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UNDER THE GREAT SEAL

BY

JOSEPH HATTON

AUTHOR OF

"BY ORDER OF THE CZAR", "CLYTIE",
"PRINCESS MAZAROFF", ETC. ETC.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE BLISS OF LOOKING FORWARD	1
II.	THE RAKE'S PROGRESS	12
III.	HE CALLED IT LOVE	25
IV.	HARRY BARKSTEAD'S LATEST CONQUEST	46
V.	THE COUNTRY BEAUTY IN TOWN	74
VI.	"SIR, YOU ARE A BLACK-HEARTED SCOUNDREL"	82
VII.	A SURPRISE FOR HARTLEY'S ROW	95
VIII.	SURPRISES FOR HARTLEY'S ROW	107
IX.	THE TRAGEDY OF THE NORFOLK INN	119
X.	THE WATCHMAN'S LANTERN	134
XI.	"THROUGH THE VALLEY"	144
XII.	A BAD DREAM WITH A LOVELY IMAGE IN IT	157
XIII.	THE PATIENCE OF ZACCHEUS WEBB	168
XIV.	ALL ON A SUMMER'S DAY	188
XV.	THE BURIED TREASURE	196
XVI.	DAVID'S WIFE	225
XVII.	A HAPPY FAMILY	240

UNDER THE GREAT SEAL.

CHAPTER I.

THE BLISS OF LOOKING FORWARD.

A STRANGE night for David.

His father lay in an alcove of the great salon which was his share of the palace since he had come into money. For hours David sat by his side and watched.

The old man slept peacefully. His breathing was regular. He did not stir. There were not observable even the twitchings and movements that are seen in a dog's sleep. David sometimes wondered if he would wake again.

As morning began to creep in through the

dusty windows, David wrapped himself up in his cloak and lay down. He had not been asleep as it seemed to him but a few minutes when he was disturbed by the gondolier who had brought in his father's roll and coffee, and with an extra supply for David. The truth is the boy had only been asleep an hour. It was eight o'clock.

"I knew Teresa had made up a bed for you, signor," said the gondolier, "but I did not know you made the night of it as you say in the English; I disturb you too early, eh?"

"No, thank you," said David, "I shall be glad of the coffee."

"Si, signor, but the master, the illustrissimo, he still sleep; ah! then you sit up very late, it is a festival when son meet father."

Alan Keith slept on. His longs arms lay outside the coverlet; his face was serene; neither David nor the attendant said so, but they both thought it was beautiful. The gondolier found it like one of

the fine monuments in the church of San Marco. He made a remark to that effect to his wife during the day. David looked at the recumbent figure and was afraid. But while he gazed his father awoke.

"It's a' true," he said, stretching his right arm towards David, "all true! Gie me your hand, my son. How have you slept?"

"Not too well," said David, "but I don't mind that; I'll sleep to-night; you have slept, father, the sleep of the just, the sleep of the blessed. I have never seen anything like it."

"Nor have I ever felt so refreshed on awakin', David; lad, it's the first real rest I hae had sae lang as I can remember; the sleep o' a tired, contented man, dreamless as the dead; I was worn-out, lad, dog-tired, and I just feel a new man. I'm afeared I scared ye; I was just a wee bit scared mysel'; but it was nature giving out, weary for a rest after years and years o' waitin',

wi' a secret that was burnin' into the very life o' me, wi' a longin' beyond a' imagination. David, we'll celebrate the day."

The sun came out bravely. For an hour or two it was almost summer.

Alan talked of Venice, and showed it to his son with an air of ownership.

They breakfasted at a café in the Square of St. Mark's more luxuriously than David had ever breakfasted before; they drank their wine and watched the busy throng, and listened to the Austrian band.

Many persons saluted the picturesque old man and smiled upon him with a sort of pitying admiration. The mad Englishman had become almost an institution of the city, more especially since his ship had come in, as Father Lavello had described the opening of his banking account.

Without understanding a word they said, David could gather that the Venetians looked upon his

father very much in the way he had been more than once inclined to regard him, as a kindly dreamer, one whose troubles and disasters had turned his head and with a Divine charity in the direction of a fortune of buried treasure: and yet his father had been so explicit and so clear in his account, so definite in his chart and plans, and his story filled up so much of what had hitherto been blank to David that he only doubted for a moment while he believed for hours and days; and now he began to feel anxious in the direction of Caister; anxious to be gone even from the Paradise of the Sea, to tell Elmira of his great fortune and to make arrangements for a siege of the rocky coast of Labrador. That, of course, was not to be thought of until the first days of summer should begin to loosen the icy bonds of the coast and make navigation possible in its most difficult waters.

"This is my son," Alan would say now and

then in his queer Italian to acquaintances and others who paused to bid him good day. They would smile and wish him well; only one or two had heard the story of the wreck and the landing of the young English sailor. These stopped to talk and chatter and shake the lad's hand.

"He will be rich," said Alan to a friend of the absent Lavello, "I am to fit oot a ship for him i' Venice, a barque as tight and trim as the hand o' man can make it."

Nobody took Alan seriously, but he took their nods and smiles for friendliness and good neighbourship; and so all was well.

"Let us go in and thank God!" said Alan, after David had feasted his eyes on the gold-fonted glories of St. Mark's. They entered with others while the choir was filling the strangely beautiful temple with music that was divine. David passed the *bénitier* but knelt by his father's side and his heart beat devoutly; he wept silently,

thanked God for his preservation, and prayed for the blessing of His protecting hand on the ocean paths that still lay before him.

From St. Mark's they wandered about the city, following its narrow paths, loitering in its little squares, tarrying at its shop windows and basking in the welcome winter sun that shone upon the Beau Rivage, whence they took a gondola and floated by the palaces of the Grand Canal, coming to an anchor for dinner at the little café by the Rialto, where the Turkish guardian of the ancient palace was solemnly refreshing himself. They talked, these two, Alan and the Turk, without understanding much that either of them said; and after dinner Alan invited the other frequenters of the place to join him in a flagon of Chianti. Later, when the sun had disappeared, and the moon had taken up the marvellous story of the day and night, David and his father walked home to their chilly room,

where Teresa had done all she knew to make it comfortable. The lamps and the candles were lighted, and before they were well seated among their rugs and cushions she entered with black coffee and cognac.

Father and son lighted their pipes, and then it was that David unfolded to his father those experiences, engagements, and desires that were nearest to his heart.

While David spoke of the cottage at Caister, and the creek where Zaccheus hauled up his dingey, and other fishermen dragged ashore their yawls, he saw in imagination the sun shining upon it, the trackless dunes, the blue sea, and the garden full of flowers, more particularly the seat with its figure-head and its hollyhocks, with Elmira in every picture. Alan sat and smoked, and sipped his coffee, and offered by way of comment encouraging little monosyllables, and watched the glowing face of the lad as the

boy's love brought the blushes to his cheeks.

"I see it a'," said Alan, presently; "dinna ye waste your breath, laddie, and there's nae need for ye to blush; she's your sweetheart, Elmira Webb; a gude lassie, the daughter of a gude father. The sea meks brave gude men, David, and honest, wholesome wenches. I'll back your own heart to hae selected weel, and ye hae my consent reight off, and God bless ye baith!"

Alan reached out his long arm, took David's hand, and pressed it with a long, fond grip.

"There's naught ennobles a man sae much as a true and honest love. David, we'll mek a queen o' her! She shall deck hersel' i' the finest jewels that the St. Dennis won frae timid hearts to hand over to British bulldogs; ye'll see, lad! David, I seem to hae renewed my youth sin' last neight. I ken a' ye feel this minute; ye are like the psalmist sighin' for wings; and ye shall hae them, lad. There's a fine, well-found

ship i' port—an East Indiaman bound for London. We'll sail together, and ye shall tell your lassie, 'This is my father,' and I'll talk wi' Zaccheus Webb aboot the men that gae doon to the sea in ships. And mayhap it might be best to fit oot our barque for Newfoundland at Bristol or Plymouth; and we could then tek a trip to Dartmouth and see the country where your grandfather's folk hailed frae. Nay, on second thoughts, that will be a good country to steer clear fra'e lest we be detained wi' discoveries o' the cursed brood o' Ristack and the rest. I'm gaein' to be wise and discreet, wi' the wisdom o' the serpent as puir aud Doolan used to say; I'm just a man o' peace, David; a man wi' a vast stake i' the country oot yonder."

David with a passing thought of how Yarmouth and Caister would stare at his tall and bony father with his deep set eyes, his long thin hands, his strange gait and manner, and his

curious dress, was, however, nothing loth to have his companionship across the sea. He felt sure that Elmira would forgive his foreign and ancient aspect when she knew that he was rich; though the secret of Wilderness Creek was not to be shared by mortal soul outside father and son.

And so the youthful and only survivor of the peaceful "Morning Star;" and the old and only survivor of the fighting brigantine "St. Dennis," sailed from the quay at Venice out into the Adriatic, bound for the London docks. No shadow of the impending heart-ache and trouble that awaited David on his return to the scene of his looked-for happiness fell upon his homeward journey. It followed the blessed dispensation of Providence that David should have no foreknowledge of coming ills, while on the back-going track of Alan, his father, the flowers of forgetfulness and consolation were blossoming freely and shedding sweet and unlooked-for perfumes.

CHAPTER II.

THE RAKE'S PROGRESS.

"Is Mrs. Longford-West at home?" asked Mr. Harry Barkstead, dismounting from his horse at the hall-door of Filby House, a straggling low-roofed mansion surrounded with gardens in which close-clipped lawns and ornamental yews were quaint and restful features of the place.

"Yes, sir," said a smart footman with the servile courtesy of a town servant.

"Dobbs, put up my horse for an hour, and give him some oats," said Harry, addressing Mrs. Longford-West's head groom, who was passing in the direction of the stables.

"Yes, sir," said Dobbs, taking charge of a chestnut that was just beginning to show the effects of a hard gallop, his neck wet, his mouth white with foam.

"A word with you, Mr. Barkstead," said Mrs. Cooper, the housekeeper, who appeared on the scene as the hall-door closed. "This way, if you please."

Harry following Mrs. Cooper, beat his leather breeches a little impatiently with his whip, and she led him into her own room in the kitchen wing of the house. Here she turned on him a face pale with anger.

"What is it, Mrs. Cooper?" said Harry.

"Stop your visits to the lodge, and put no more of your verses into the alder tree by the ten acre meadow, d'ye hear?"

"Does Jessie object to my visits and my verses?"

"I object to them."

"But I don't go to the lodge to see you, nor do you inspire my verses, Mrs. Cooper."

"No, but if you go to the lodge again to see Jessie you'll see me," said Mrs. Cooper, her lips white with passion, her hands trembling.

"Shall I? Then I won't go again, Mrs. Cooper."

"God knows if the mischief is not already done," was the reply; "if it is, look to it, Mr. Barkstead. If the girl is but an orphan, she is not without friends."

"I hope not," said Harry.

"And Norfolk's not without law either, for that matter, and Justice Barkstead, though he's your father, will hardly see even his son bring ruin upon the helpless and the innocent, though if report does not wrong you, there's many a girl that could accuse you."

Having mastered her first emotion, Mrs. Cooper found her words come freely, and the more she said the more she felt she had to say.

"Indeed," said Harry; "did Mrs. Longford-

West know that you were going to honour me with these pleasant remarks?"

"No, sir, but I dare say she knows you well enough not to trust you any further than she can see you. She can take care of herself."

"Oh, you think so?" said Harry. "Shall I tell her what you say? Is the position of housekeeper at Filby House so poor a place that you can afford to throw it away? Or have you feathered your nest so well that you are thinking of retiring with some happy man into a snug little tavern, 'good accommodation for man and beast?'"

"I can afford everything, Mr. Henry Barkstead, but to see my motherless niece go to the bad, without an effort to save her."

As she spoke she drew a necklace from her pocket and flung it at his feet.

"And there's the bauble you gave her! Take it and put it round the neck of some other softie

who is fool enough to listen to your honeyed lies and promises."

"Very well, since you wish it," said Harry, fishing it from the floor with his riding-whip.

"Ah, I don't doubt ye," said Mrs. Cooper, opening the door in reply to Mrs. Longford-West's bell. "Good-morning, Squire Barkstead, the mistress is waiting to receive you."

"Look here, Mrs. Cooper," said Harry, "I pass over your rudeness, firstly, because you are in anger, and secondly, for the sake of your pretty little niece. Good-morning."

As he closed the door Mrs. Cooper flung herself into a chair and burst into tears.

Mrs. Longford-West was a rich widow. She had been twice married, and scandal said she ought really to have been thrice a widow, though she was only five-and-thirty and did not look her age within some years. Blonde, buxom, ample of bust and figure, just tall enough not to be

dumpy, she was the picture of health, and had a free and hearty manner that made men happy and at home in her society, and most of her lady visitors ill at ease, not to say uncomfortable.

She brought from her house and society in town the unrestrained manners of its loosest social circles, and enjoyed the confusion they created among stranger guests who called upon her for the first time. Nevertheless she managed to make herself popular in the county. She gave freely to everything and to everybody: to the Church, the races, subscribed liberally to the hunt, patronised public institutions in a generous way, and so managed to keep on visiting terms, if not with all the best families, at least with such of them as were prominently before the public.

Sir Anthony Barkstead was her nearest neighbour, and she made a great point of conciliating his prejudices and opinions as far as she was able; for, truth to tell, she and his gallant and highly

educated son and heir were on the very best of neighbourly terms; indeed there were those who thought it even possible that Mrs. Longford-West, if anything happened to old Sir Anthony, might live to be Lady Barkstead. They, who allowed themselves to speculate so far ahead in regard to the future of Mrs. Longford-West, did not know the disposition and character of Harry Barkstead.

"Well, so you have returned, my dear Harry," said the lady of Filby House, giving him her plump, generous hand to kiss. "You are more Quixotic than I think if the western city had not some other attraction for you, beyond seeing that poor young clerk of Petherick's off to sea. Perhaps you had an engagement in Bath, eh?"

"No, I assure you, my dear Libby," said Harry, taking the smiling, unresisting face of madame between his hands and kissing the white forehead, "pure friendship, on my honour!"

"Swear by something more reliable, my dear

Harry," said the lady; "honour is for serious, sober men, when they have sown all their wild oats."

"Do you say so?" Harry replied, sitting by her side on a rather uncomfortable Italian couch, "you ought to know."

"You are a brute, Harry!" said Mrs. Longford-West, "a perfect brute! What do you mean?"

"That you are the most charming of widows and the most generous of friends," said her visitor, "and I desire to ask the most delightful of her sex to accept a souvenir of that City of the West which is distinguished, because it is the neighbour of the Bath where first I had the honour of meeting Mrs. Aylesbury Norton."

"You are very cruel, Harry; you know I hate the name of Norton. However I came to marry into such a family Heaven only knows; I never should if I had met dear Longford-West before my young heart was ensnared by Aylesbury Norton."

"And to think it is only five years since all

this happened, and I was sowing my first sack of wild oats, as you would say, when I danced that first cotillon with you."

"Don't talk of time; it was made for men who have not the wit and women who have not the beauty to defy it."

"You certainly have both the wit and the beauty, my dear Libby. But here it is—that little souvenir; they are famous for eastern gems and antiquities at Bristol, they say; I bought this in College Green—it belonged to an Indian Princess."

He opened a richly-embossed case and drew forth a quaint brooch with a diamond set in pearls

"There—do not say you are not always in my thoughts, and believe me when I add that I could not go to Bath for thinking of the happy days that can never return."

"My dear Harry," said the lady tenderly, "you are always the same sweet, irritating, dear good

fellow! It is a lovely brooch, thank you so much—and you may kiss me."

Harry put his arms about the ample waist and took his reward heartily, declaring that he did not know what under heaven would happen to him if he should lose his dear, dear Libby.

"Ah, Harry, you have said the same thing to many another woman," was dear Libby's rejoinder.

"No, on my—well, on my soul," he replied.

"I suppose you must be forgiven; young men will be young men; but one day you will have to settle down you know—and oh! dear Harry, what shall I do then? Unless—but there, it is not leap year."

"Only one year to wait," said Harry. "But don't let us talk about settling down; if I am not called upon to settle up I shall not mind. Do you remember what the poet says in the tragedy?—'Widows know so much.'"

"You are a wicked scamp!" exclaimed Mrs. Longford-West; "widows are poor, libelled, innocent creatures; their only fault is that they are too tender, too forbearing with the men; self-denial is their only fault. Take poor me for instance. To save my life I couldn't help confessing that I love you—why should I when you know it?"

"My dear, good, generous Libby," exclaimed Harry, taking another kiss from the full, liberal lips of his hostess, and then rising to go.

"Why so soon?" she asked.

"Business, dear," he said; "business of importance at Yarmouth; a personal message to the chief magistrate from Sir Anthony."

"Truly?" she asked.

"Truly," he replied. "May I ring for Dobbs to bring my horse?"

"Oh, yes, if it must be so," she replied.

Harry rang, the horse was ordered, and guest and hostess were about to part when Harry said.

"By-the-way, the girl at the lodge—Jessie; Mrs. Cooper seems to think that a little civility I paid the girl has turned her head—the truth is—"

"Only a little civility?" remarked Mrs. Longford-West, with a strong note of interrogation.

"My dear Libby, now that is unkind; you know I am fond of gardening and that your man Dunn has no rival as a florist. I am sure Sir Anthony would give him any wages if he were free, which of course he never will be so long as his mistress loves flowers, and he glories in making Filby House the paradise it should be with such an Eve—I mean such a goddess."

"Now I know there is something wrong, Harry; you are paying compliments for the mere sake of talking; what is it?"

"Well, between ourselves, that is exactly what I asked Mrs. Cooper, who desired a few words with me as I came in; and all I could gather was that she wished me not to look in at the lodge

any more. I hate mysteries, as you know, so I thought I would mention it; one gets the reputation of being a gallant, however unworthy one is of the title—a Lovelace, as an old fool of a guardian once called me in the Park—and it is all over with a fellow. Ah, well, one day, as you say, the oats will all have been sown; meanwhile, dearest Libby, *au revoir!*"

"The reprobate!" said Mrs. Longford-West, "the scamp, the prodigal! Oh, you goose, Libby Longford-West—you idiot, you foolish Clarissa! You cannot help loving him; they may, indeed, truly say that the first sigh of love is the last of wisdom!"

CHAPTER III.

HE CALLED IT LOVE.

It was a glorious day in September—the roads hedged with hips and haws and gay with browning leaves. The sky was bright, the wind was fresh. Sportsmen were in the stubbles and the turnips. The crack of their guns was heard afar, and the light whiffs of smoke from their burnt powder marked the groups of gunners that followed the poor, brown-coated partridge. Harry was in high spirits. He might have been riding forth on some right worthy mission, so merry was he, talking to his horse, singing snatches of old ballads, laughing now and then, and returning

the greetings of passers-by with a bright, cheerful face that more than one mischievous wench turned round to gaze upon, but never unnoticed by the distinguished-looking young horseman.

"I'd not walked in that garden,
The past of half an hour,
When there I saw two pretty maids,
Sitting under a shady bower.
The first was lovely Nancy,
So beautiful and fair,
The other was a virgin,
Who did the laurel wear."

He trolled out Zaccheus Webb's favourite song n a jovial merry way, and later it pleased his mood to chant a snatch of "The Miller of the Dee," giving more particularly full emphasis to "I care for nobody, and nobody cares for me."

The trot of his horse suited the measure of the rhyme, and the cheeriness of the day was in harmony with the song.

"A dare-devil," said the toll-gate man to a carter, who made way for the young squire. "None more so, I've heard say," was the carter's response; and Harry, pulling up his horse to gather a sprig of honeysuckle, which he stuck into his button-hole, toasted the women, as Charles toasted them in Sheridan's famous comedy—

> Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen,
> Here's to the widow of fifty;
> Here's to the flaunting extravagant quean,
> And here's to the housewife that's thrifty.

He was encouraging his low ambition; the ambition of the gallant, the libertine, the deceiver of women. His best impulses presenting themselves in opposition now and then, he beat up ribald songs or started selfish thoughts to keep lust and passion in the van. He was like a savage on the war-path beating his tom-tom and shouting his war-cry. He regarded women with but

little more consideration than the sportsmen whom he had passed regarded partridges. Both were game to his mind, and his mind was common in those days among bucks and dandies. Such men counted their conquests as the North American Indian counted his scalps. There are similar creatures walking about disguised as honest men in these days and will be to the end of time; for God makes such things, unless it is as poor Marian suggested in the poem, that "the devil slavers them so excellently that we come to doubt who's strongest, He who makes or he who mars."

It is hardly conceivable that Harry Barkstead, fresh from seeing his friend off on a long sea journey and charged with sweet and tender messages to the girl who was pledged to be David Keith's wife, could contemplate the villainy that Mephistopheles instigated in *Faust*; a villainy indeed a thousand times blacker, and yet a villainy not altogether wholly inspired of the devil or of

Barkstead's own depraved mind, but half inspired by the girl herself; half encouraged by her coquetry, her vanity of conquest, her ambition to be admired, her love of dress, and her consciousness of physical charms calculated to attract; and therefore the more necessary to be guarded, the more blessed to have for the bestowal upon a true and pure love.

He called at Hartley's Row, having promised David that he would do so. It would please Miss Mumford, the boy had said, and Mildred Hope would be the happier for his courtesy; they would also be proud to see him. Oh, yes, he called. They were both there, Mildred and Sally, both looking equally sad. He cheered them with good news, told them of the fine ship David had been lucky enough to sail in, spoke of his comfortable berth, and made some sentimental remark about the ship's name that quite took Mildred Hope, who felt for a moment in her heart—great heart in a

small body—that after all Mr. Barkstead might not be so callous as she had feared. The "Morning Star!" Yes it was a name of happy omen Harry repeated; he hoped Mildred would forgive him for quoting a poet, who was not popular in religious circles but who really was not wholly bad; it was from the "Giaour"—

> "She was a form of life and light,
> That seen became a part of sight,
> And rose, whene'er I turned mine eye,
> The morning star of Memory."

"You don't read Byron, of course, Miss Hope?" he went on; "I suppose Mr. Crabbe is more to your liking?"

"I don't find time to read much," said Mildred, turning her serious eyes full upon him, "but I know Aldborough, and I have read Mr. Crabbe. His books are quite recognised, I hear, in London.

We know little of them here, where we should know them best."

"Rather prosy to be called a poet," said Harry, "but means well."

"No doubt," said Mildred.

"I suppose you will be going to Mr. Webb's, sir?" remarked Miss Mumford.

"Well, yes," said Harry, "I thought of riding over now; my first business in Yarmouth was to call and see you, and give you David's last messages—his love, you know, and best wishes, and his desire that you should keep up good hearts about him, and so on; and then he charged me to tell Elmira—Miss Webb, I suppose I ought to say—that he will look forward to his return as the happiest day of his life, and all the rest of it. You know the kind of thing a lad would say, Miss Hope, under the circumstances."

Harry's good spirits and the flippant way in which he delivered his messages, the gaiety of

his manner, the foppishness of his velvet coat, his gold headed riding whip, his clanking spurs, were out of harmony with the feeling of the two women, and a kind of rebuke to their environment.

Poor Sally Mumford, her heart full of love and anxiety for David; and Mildred Hope, all sympathy for her friend, and with that deeper unspoken love for the lad that Sally only half-suspected; they found no ready response to the young squire's messages and comment. There was an awkward pause, during which he caressed his pearl-buttoned gaiters with his whip and said he must go now, his mare was a little fretful, and he thought he must give her a rest at the "Norfolk," and drive over to Caister with his messages to Zaccheus and Miss Webb. Did they think he should find them at home?

Mildred thought Zaccheus would be fishing. She saw "The Scud" off Gorleston in the early morning, and the Yarmouth men had mostly put out the day before.

"And Miss Webb?" said Harry, "have you seen her?"

"Not since Sunday," said Mildred, "she was at church."

"In a fine new gown," said Miss Mumford, "and a hat fit for a duchess."

"You don't approve of Elmira's fine feathers," said Harry.

"There's time and place for everything," said Sally, "and with David away I must say I did think the girl he has engaged himself to might have considered it in her hat and gown."

Sally spoke a little impulsively, set on to be critical, not so much on account of Elmira's finery, as by reason of the something flippant and thoughtless, to say the least, in Mr. Barkstead's remarks about David.

"But young ladies, and especially pretty ones, Miss Mumford, have a license in the matter of

their toilette, and Miss Webb always dressed a little above her station."

"More's the pity," Sally replied.

"David likes to see her in pretty gowns," said Mildred, addressing her friend Sally, "and she has taste, everybody must admit that. Poor Elmira, she has a good heart, and she is right to try and be cheerful. Did you notice how well she sung in the fishermen's hymn, as they call it—a supplication for those at sea?"

"Oh, I have nothing against the dear child," replied Sally, regretting the words she had spoken; "give my love to her, Mr. Barkstead, if you see her, and me and Miss Hope have it in mind to pay a call to-morrow, and perhaps she will come to tea on Sunday after Church. But I will ask her that myself. And you need not mention that I thought her too gaily dressed; it might hurt the gel's feelings, and heaven knows I don't wish to do that."

"I'm very unhappy," said Sally, when Barkstead had jangled his spurs along the Row, and mounted his horse, "about Elmira; I am afeared this young man is heartless, and I never believed in the truth of his friendliness for our dear David. It's an awful thing for a gel to be without a mother; and that Charity Dene's no good, not a ha'porth of sense! As for Zaccheus why he's away for hours and sometimes for days; what's to hinder a designing young man like this reckless prodigal squire, with his fine manners and his grand ways, from making a fool of the lass, when she meets him half way with her vanity and fal-lals?"

"Comfort you," said Mildred, "Elmira has far more sense than you think; besides, she is proud, very proud; in such a girl pride is a good thing, and she loves her father; furthermore she is engaged to be married."

"I don't care, I wouldn't trust her out of my

sight if I was her mother or her aunt or foster or whatever it might be; she knows little more than how to do her hair and wear her clothes, and she gives her mind to that only to mek folk gossip and set the men a-staring. You talk of her singin' in church, didn't you see every young feller there, as we come out, stare at her, and some of the old ones too? And she just knew all about it. I've no patience with such ways, and especially when ivverybody knows that our David, poor lad, is gone to sea and would break his heart if he thought she gave cause for a light word to be said about her while he was away. It's bad enough when he's at home to look after her."

"Poor David! poor Elmira!" was Mildred's response; "we must pray that God will guard the motherless child. I will go and see her every day; she will often listen to me; there is much good in the girl's heart."

"And much vanity," said Sally. "I fear David, with his trusting soul, and his faith and honour, has sorrow in store there—yes, I do."

Then Sally began to cry and Mildred made an ingenious feminine effort to sooth her; and all the while Harry Barkstead was making his way to Caister, not driving, as he at first intended, but sitting in the stern of "The Swallow," which he had found at the jetty with one of Webb's men, bound for the cottage with some fish and groceries and other trifles that Zaccheus had ordered him to procure and deliver at the old house on the dunes, with a message that he "mought or he mought not come ashore as the case mought be."

It was sunset by the time "The Swallow" ground her keel upon the shore at Caister. A light mist was stealing over the hillocks. The sea was sighing along the sands in long low waves. Harry assisted the fisherman to haul up the boat.

Charity Dene came down from the cottage, her apron over her head. She was main glad to see the squire; and mighty sure as Miss Elmira would be the same. Miss Elmira had been that lonely she'd lighted a fire in parlour and set her a-practising of the spinet, and they'd a-been expecting of Mistress Mildred Hope; so in the meantime Miss Elmira was playin' of herself and had ben a-singing only just that minnit, as she was a-hopin' her father ud be comin' later on to supper."

And sure enough while they were walking up to the garden gate Elmira's voice was heard faintly, and she was singing,

"'Twas down in Cupid's garden
For pleasure I did go,
To see the fairest flowers
That in the garden grow."

Elmira had heard that Harry Barkstead had returned; but it cannot be said for a certainty

that the fire in the parlour, the new autumn dress, the bunch of flowers on the table, and the song of Cupid's Garden were for him. At the same time it was reasonable to expect he might call; and David would like his friend to be fittingly received.

Harry bestowed upon the hand put forth to greet him a long lingering pressure; and when Elmira protested that he would be shaking hands all night, he sighed and exclaimed, "Ah, if it might be for ever!"

Then he leaned pensively against the window and looked out into the garden, and likened the drooping and frost-smitten flowers to his own blighted hopes.

Elmira said she was sorry that parting with David had made him so sad.

Harry in reply said he envied David almost to hating him.

Elmira did not ask for David's messages, but

remarked that she did not know why Harry should envy David. The gentleman born did not usually envy the lad who came of ordinary parents, and had his way to make in the world. Elmira said this with a little laugh of derision.

Harry replied that love levelled all ranks, and that beauty elevated the lowliest swain, and with other fine phrases gradually brought Elmira round to thoughts of Harry and not of David.

It is true they did speak of David. Every now and then Harry would drop a word or two of news from Bristol—how happy David was at going, while in his place he (Harry) would not have left the woman he was going to marry for all the gold of an El Dorado. But David was a practical fellow; he was like the happy common people; he thought of a house for his love with some bits of furniture; was as happy as Tom, the fisherman, sitting with his Poll on his knee the day before the wedding. David sent all kinds

of fond messages; oh, yes, he did that; so did one of the sailors send his love to Jemima by a rough chap from Cardiff, and there was very much of the same kind of vulgar sincerity in David's messages. "Tell Elmira I know the sort of house she likes; tell her I mean to take her to London for the honeymoon"—poor chap, he would be like a fish out of water in London—"ah, well, he's a good boy, means well, and really believes he is in love."

After a little while, Elmira, who had begun by being somewhat prim, sat down with Harry, on the old chintz-covered sofa, and permitted him to hold her hand while he described London to her, and Cheltenham, and Bath, and then chatted of Paris and the German Spas, dropping in a sighing regret that girls would be in such a hurry to get engaged to be married, before they had seen the world and knew something of life; marriage brought troubles and responsibili-

ties; all very well, of course, when a girl had enjoyed herself a little. And besides, how did a girl know whether she was really in love with a man until she had seen some examples of the sex? Fancy any girl, with any pretensions to beauty, confining her choice to Yarmouth!

"And passing by the handsome and fascinating Harry Barkstead," said Elmira, laughing.

"If Harry Barkstead hadn't been such a fool as to let his friendship for a conceited boy stand in his way, the prettiest girl in the county of Norfolk would have been in his arms at this moment.

"And who may she be?" Elmira asked, with a flash of her dark eyes.

"Oh, you witch!" Harry exclaimed, slipping his arm round her supple waist and kissing her, "you will drive me crazy."

"I think you are already a little gone in that direction," said Elmira, struggling to her feet,

her face flushed, but without anything like anger in her eyes.

"Elmira, I love you! I know I am a scamp to say so; I know it is an outrage on friendship; but I can't help it——"

"Oh, Harry!" was Elmira's only answer, as she moved away from the intended embrace that was meant for the conclusion of his declaration.

"You forgive me, don't you?" he asked, as she evaded his touch.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I don't see how I can be angry."

"You always knew I loved you!"

"How should I know when you never told me?"

"If I had, would you now be engaged, as he says you are, to David Keith?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"Oh, don't ask so many questions. Come into

the other room; Mrs. Dene will think it odd, and she is always joking me about you."

"Is she?"

"Says I like you best, and thinks you are such a gentleman!"

"I am infinitely obliged to Mrs. Dene," Harry replied.

"Oh, she is a great admirer of yours."

"Before we go, Elmira, may I come again later?"

"How later?"

"If your father does not come home?"

"No, sir, certainly not," said Elmira, her hand upon the door.

"I have so much to say to you."

"Don't you think you have said enough for the present?"

"Elmira," he said, gliding up to her before she had time to move, and laying his hand upon her arm, "say you don't hate me."

"Of course I don't," was the reply.

"Then say you love me."

"Oh, that is a very different thing," she said, but her eyes encouraged the kiss that he pressed silently upon her lips, and as she left him she returned the pressure of his hand.

"Charity," she said, "Mr. Barkstead has some news for you from your friend Mr. David Keith," and then she went hurriedly to her own room and flung herself upon the bed.

After a long talk with Mrs. Dene, Harry said he must go, and he wished to say good evening to Miss Webb; but Elmira sent him word that she had a headache and he must excuse her.

"Has she relented?" Harry was saying to himself as he walked along the road towards Yarmouth. "I've known impulsive women do so after the most unpromising interview. Ah, well, the chief pleasure of capture is in playing your fish. Once fairly hooked, Mrs. Charity Dene must help me with the landing net!"

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY BARKSTEAD'S LATEST CONQUEST.

THE hours were weeks, the weeks years to Mildred Hope and Sally Mumford since David was no longer at Hartley's Row, and was to be seen no more bounding across the dunes to Webb's cottage, or pushing off "The Swallow" on trips to the "Flying Scud," or on afternoon sails with the smack-owner's daughter.

They talked of no one else, these two women, except when Mildred felt bound to remember her missionary duties. She found Sally more than usually sympathetic towards women whose husbands were away at sea. No tale of sorrow went to

Hartley's Row without relief. Sally said whatever she did she did it because she was sure it would please David.

Mildred upbraided herself in her own room and upon her knees for thinking so much of David; and yet the more she tried to put him out of her thoughts the more he would obtrude. This was even so when she was at prayers. Once she had done penance in a long fast and an increased prison duty on account of a transient feeling of jealousy against Elmira Webb. She found the face of David Keith coming between her and the Church, thoughts of him taking the place of holy reflections. She took long walks where he had walked, encouraged people to talk of him, even allowed Miss Mumford to continue speaking of the wish that David had chosen her for his wife instead of Elmira.

Mildred Hope was in love with David; she would not have admitted it even to Sally; nor

would she have denied it, being charged with it. She admitted it in her prayers, and asked for forgiveness; for was she not wedded to Duty, to the service of the Lord? Had she not bound herself to be one of His shepherds, to watch over His flocks, to visit the sick and needy, to give up her life to His mission?

In her most intense religious moods Mildred felt as keenly the sin she believed she was committing as any nun might have felt under similar circumstances. And yet her love had sweet dreamy moments in which she built castles in the sunny air of the dunes, with bitter moments to follow when the winds blew from the North and scattered them with the spume of the sea and the red leaves of the autumn.

Poor little Mildred Hope! Why will women think they are strong enough to make vows and take up duties, in opposition to impulses of the heart and under the influences of which they

may fall at any time? Mildred could not know her destiny any more than any other woman. She had no right to cast her horoscope and act upon her own views of the future. It had all been mapped out for her, no doubt, long before she had any ideas of her own. She could be charitable and religious, she could visit the fatherless and the widows, without vowing to herself or to Heaven that she would do nothing else. Nor was all this benevolent activity and self-sacrifice incompatible with falling in love, nor with marriage; and yet Mildred went about as if she had committed a secret crime, a sacrilege.

Sally Mumford had sleepless nights whenever the wind blew more than ordinarily, and in all her moods that touched David's welfare she blamed Elmira Webb. David only went to sea to get money for her. She had bewitched him. The lad cared nothing for money until he knew her. Latterly he had

thought of nothing else beyond making Elmira a lady, buying her this and the other. He talked of a yacht to sail with her into foreign ports, wondered if he would have money enough to buy a house in London. She admitted, of course, that David thought of her too, and often said his dear mother Sally should have a fine house in Yarmouth market-place, with as many servants as Mr. Petherick, and nothing to do; and, as Miss Mumford put it, was generally off his head about money, and all because Elmira was a vain lass and wanted gew-gaws and fine clothes, and to live above her station, and so on.

Autumn was passing into winter, and while Mildred and Sally were hungering for news of the "Morning Star," and Sally was criticising Elmira's conduct, they had suddenly to face a wreck ashore that seemed almost as pitiable a one as if David had gone down with his ship. Miss Mumford, in the first rush of feeling, exclaimed, "I knew

it would come to ill, our David has had a narrow escape!" and then she wept to think of the blow it would be to Zaccheus Webb, the shock to David. Mildred had brought the news. She had been to Caister twice without being able to make anyone hear at the cottage, and on the third summons she had seen Mrs. Charity Dene—but it will be best to tell the story as it occurred; it follows, in a natural sequence, the previous chapter wherein Harry Barkstead gave Elmira David's message, and his own.

The first snow of the winter season was falling upon the eastern coast, making the dunes all white and smooth; it was as if nature had intervened to cover up the tell-tale treacherous footsteps that marked the flight of Elmira Webb; for she had disappeared with Harry Barkstead, and no one knew whither.

Zaccheus Webb was away at sea, detained by heavy gales. He had put into a distant port;

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and Sir Anthony Barkstead's son had made his latest conquest complete. Day after day he had lingered at the cottage, and had won over as a confederate in his suit of love Mrs. Charity Dene, who had sat complacently outside the parlour door to hear him play upon the spinet those old songs and quaint gavottes, that were full of fascination under his pliant fingers. He had invited Charity to the finest wedding she would ever see, and so on; getting possession of the foolish housekeeper's sympathy and good word; while Elmira drank in his romances of the London world, saw herself as Lady Barkstead, and forgot her vows to David Keith, and even her duty to her doting father, as girls have often done before and will to the end of time under the spell of the seducer's honeyed words and right gallant promises.

But surely this pretty Elmira Webb was born to carry on the heritage of misery that rests

with vanity and beauty? There is one thing in writing about women, in telling their stories, the theme is ever new. No two women are alike. Under certain given circumstances you can make a good guess at the conduct of the average man, but not of the average woman. They love, hate, fear, marry or live single lives, but each with totally different impulses, feelings and influences. You might think you knew Elmira Webb. Harry Barkstead was convinced that he understood her. Perhaps he did. Anyhow you and I would have thought her pride, her tact and her common-sense would have sought protection in a wedding ring before she became the travelling companion of Harry Barkstead, to say nothing of dishonouring the name and breaking the heart of her most kind, affectionate and devoted father.

Elmira was born without the capacity to be constant. Some men have not the faculty of friendship. Harry Barkstead was a sensualist.

He was led by his passions, Elmira Webb by her vanity. But not by that alone. She rejoiced in her beauty. In an Eastern slave market she would have encouraged the bidding. She had no conscience that is as far as one can judge by her conduct. Yet she never vexed her father, was courteous, hospitable, delighted in pleasing everybody, and was quite a thrifty hand at housekeeping. What was wrong with her? who can tell? She liked David Keith, thought she loved him, when she laid her head on his knee in "The Swallow" that night, when he told her he was going to Newfoundland; but the shadow of Harry Barkstead falling across her vows, she rejoiced in the competition for her love, and thought of the uninterrupted flirtation she might have with Harry while David was away. A curious, contradictory, pretty, inconstant, merry, mischievous, provoking daughter of Eve, this belle of the eastern coast.

Elmira, without indulging in any particular introspective reflections, did, in a way, argue with the situation.

David had been so long away, and moreover Harry Barkstead was a gentleman; and when his father died, as he could not fail to do in the course of Nature, not many years hence, her lover—who had loved her all along from his first sight of her, so he said—would take possession of his estates and title; and she would be a lady. How every marriageable girl throughout the county and far away into Suffolk, and indeed even in London town itself, would be jealous of Lady Barkstead, and she would sweep past them in her brocaded silks and splash them with her chariot wheels!

It was true, she admitted to herself, that David loved her, but how many more might have said the same had she given them opportunity? She shut her chamber door and lighted her candles,

and though she shivered in the cold she studied her charms before her glass and tried on her daintiest things; and more especially noted the flash of the diamond cross that Harry had given her.

It was a subtle thing to think of, by way of gift, a holy cross set in stones that caught all the radiance of the sun and stars, and seemed, even to Elmira, to give her eyes an added radiance. Oh, she admired herself, this rustic beauty, this fisherman's daughter! She could ape the fine lady in her very talk; and she sang the song her father liked, and Mildred only chid half-heartedly, "It was down in Cupid's Garden." David, she was sure, would make an exacting jealous husband; he had a masterful manner and he was over fond. Besides, what a hurry he was in to get her word when he knew he would be far away, as if he feared to trust her until he should return! And who knew that he ever

would return? Harry had told her of their tiff, of David's boastful manner, of their walk to Yarmouth that night, and how David had triumphed over his gentleman friend, for while Harry would not deign to let the lad feel his inferior position, yet their stations were far apart, and old Petherick's clerk should not have forgotten that. Pride was a good thing when there was something behind it, a name or money or family; but who was David Keith? And what? With his common foster mother, as she called herself, and his nameless parentage?

Harry did not say these things spitefully, but rather in sorrow, as one who had tried to be gracious, kind, and true to a lad whom he had liked for himself, apart from his common origin. When Elmira turned upon him and said her station was perhaps no better than David's, Harry said beauty was its own dower, its own name, its own rank and fortune. He mentioned lowly

girls who had shared the crowns of kings. His illustrations of the summits to which beauty had climbed took no note of happy marriages where beauty and its consort walked hand in hand, and on Sundays sat together in the church; they were theatrical, the tales of humble women winning titles and wealth, and full of bright and merry progresses through foreign lands, the opera in Paris, the carnival of Venice, the festivals at Rome, and the routs and balls of London.

As Harry built up romance after romance for her feminine edification, Elmira saw herself with white shoulders and sweeping train, with hair that had been dressed by Parisian artists in the mode, and she felt around her neck threaded beads of pearls and diamonds. For a fisherman's daughter she had a rare fancy and a lively imagination. Once she was launched in that bright happy world of wealth and show and music, of humble servitors and gilded coaches,

she felt that her fortune would be made. She had always known that she was never born for a humdrum wife such as David Keith would assuredly desire with his psalm-singing housekeeper-foster-mother, and her praying everlasting sighing little Hope at her elbow, to take the very life and soul out of every harmless jest.

Mrs. Charity Dene for one whole day and night had a call to a sick sister beyond Ormesby. Harry Barkstead filled her purse. She was very poor, and he was "such a gentleman." Moreover, Elmira vowed she would not mind being left alone; "indeed, dear Charity," she had said, "I shall like it very much. Mr. Barkstead will go home to the hall, of course, and even if he did not, what harm? I have assuredly given up all thoughts of David Keith, and Mr. Barkstead, as you say, is a gentleman.

Zaccheus's man of all work was on board "The Flying Scud." Elmira was the gracious hostess

of the cottage. How could she drive Harry Barkstead away? Did he not worship her? Then it was so strange and pleasant to be alone with your lover, secure from prying eyes, or the possibility of interfering comment. And Harry was so bright and merry, so natural, so handy, so handsome, so distinguished! He helped her to make the tea, and called it pic-nicking; he built up the winter fire and called it fun. Elmira put on her best lilac gown, and brought out the old china service that had belonged to her grandmother.

It drove Harry wild to look upon her, so fresh and happy, with her baby-waisted gown, her dark blue ribbons, her rich brown hair, her white teeth, and her merry tantalising laugh. He had no thought for the past or the future. He seemed to live a century in these short hours. Elmira was the conquest of his rarest arts, the pretty victim to his lure and bow. How well he knew

the coquettish ways of the game, the flitting to and fro, the hopping from twig to twig, the twittering of song until the trap fell and the hunter had secured his prey.

"I've often taken a hand at housekeeping," he said.

"No, have you?" she replied surrendering some trifling domestic article to be put away on shelves or in the shining corner cupboard.

"Oh yes, I love pic-nicking, and with such a partner," he went on, deftly helping her to clear the table and make the hearth tidy. "Oh, if you could only have seen Jack Hinton and me in the Australian bush!"

"Have you been in Australia, then?" she asked.

"Rather; I should think I have," said Harry. "Jack Hinton and I lived in a hut away in Western Australia for over a month; made our own beds, cooked our own food, brushed up

our own hearthstone; and Jack said I was the best housekeeper he ever came across. Poor old Jack! He is a peer of the realm now, and has given up fun and pic-nicking."

"Do you mean he is a lord?" asked Elmira.

"Yes, a real live lord," said Harry.

"That's greater than a baronet, is it not?" she remarked, folding up the table cloth and putting it in the press.

"Yes, but there are rich lords and poor, my dear, just as there are rich baronets and poor ones, and unfortunately Lord Surbiton is poor. It's a miserable business to be poor, Elmira, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," she said, "not that I have any knowledge of what it is; that is, what they call poor at Caister and Yarmouth."

"No, that is what I meant," said Harry, detecting the little glance of pride that Elmira turned upon him, "I mean compared with having ser-

vants and carriages and diamonds, and being able to do what you like; and when we drive about the world together and show it what beauty is, and that there is another Helen worth the siege of another Troy."

"Helen!" said Elmira.

"She was a famous beauty in the years that are gone, hundreds of years ago, and the greatest and bravest men fought for her—just as I would fight all the world for you, Elmira."

Then they sat upon the old oak seat in the ingle nook and Harry told her far more wonderful stories than that of Helen of Troy; for they were of current interest, belonged to the time and its ambitions and foreshadowed many and new delights for Elmira. He also spoke of their marriage. That would come all in good time. Not at present, he said, of course. There was no beating about the bush as to that. Harry was a bold wooer. He pressed his arm about

the girl's waist as he went on, and she looked into the fire and listened. To marry at present would ruin him. She did not desire that, of course; love in a cottage was all very fine for fools, but they knew better than that. His father was a martinet and had his views; but happily, if the worst came to the worst, he could not cut him out of the Ormesby estate which was his by right; and after all, that was only a very small tithe of his inheritance.

"Your father would think you lowered yourself, I suppose, by marrying me," said Elmira, with a flush of pride.

"He has great ideas about blood and pedigree, and that kind of thing."

"Well, so have I," said Elmira; "we come of an old stock, and—"

"My darling," said Harry, taking her into his arms, "you are lovely—beauty is blood, beauty is pedigree, beauty rules the world; you are fit

for an empress; you are my empress, my own!"

Elmira struggled a little to free herself from Harry's warm embrace, but, as I said before, he was a bold wooer, and there were flickering shadows on the wall, and the fire was in gentle competition with the twilight, which should most or least illuminate the room.

"There, let me be now, dear," she said, straightening her rumpled hair; "you are really too bad."

"Forgive me, sweet," he said. "Why did selfish meddling fools make ceremonies and forms? I love you, you love me, is not that enough, you do love me, do you not?"

She was standing by the fire, leaning against an arm of the settle.

"Yes, I do, Harry, but——"

"'But' is the plague, the kill-joy of youth. I want you to trust me, Elmira, I swear to you by all that is good and true, I will never leave you, never be unkind to you, give you all you can

desire, never lose a chance whatever it cost to make you happy."

Then suddenly turning his face away he said "As I live, that sneaking little prison visitor has just opened the garden gate. Quick, fasten the door!"

He hurried her into the passage, the key was inside the door; he locked it and put the key in his pocket.

"There," he said in a whisper, "let her knock until her arms ache—there is no one at home."

He stole his arm about Elmira and drew her gently aside in the shadow where they could not be seen or heard; and the next moment there was a knock at the door, a quiet inviting apologetic kind of knock. It received no reply. Again Mildred tapped the door with the handle of her umbrella. Harry laughed quietly and kissed his unresisting companion. The situation amused him. Perhaps Mildred had come with news of

David. So much the better that Elmira should not hear it. Rap-rap-rap on the door. Harry made it the signal to again embrace his pretty hostess. She dared not push him aside for fear of making a noise. Once more Mildred rapped and then all was silence. She had evidently gone away.

"It is unkind to let her go." whispered Elmira, "she has to walk all the way back to Yarmouth, and might have liked a cup of tea."

"Shall I go and call her?" he asked pretending much alacrity to do so if she wished.

"No, no," said Elmira, detaining him.

"Ah, then you do love me!" he exclaimed. "My sweet, my Elmira!"

The twilight deepened into night.

The firelight reddened the walls of the old living-room of Webb's cottage.

Elmira closed the shutters. Harry said there was no need to light the lamp.

Just above the shutters where the woodwork

left a pane visible a star shone through. The hum of the sea could be heard without. It was a lovely, starlight night.

Alan Keith sighing to his son had said it was always to-morrow. But to-morrow does come to many. It comes to the bankrupt; it comes to the condemned criminal; it came to Elmira Webb; it had come before to Harry Barkstead; but this was Elmira's most memorable morrow, and it came in with a watery sun; it came with a sighing of the sea; it came with little shuddering winds across the dunes.

It was a cold morning, yet the sun was shining upon the cottage. It had been noticed by one or two passers by, friends of the Webbs, that the shutters were not down at ten o'clock.

Soon after that hour, a man's hand cautiously pushed open the lattice of Elmira's window, and Harry Barkstead looked out. The hollyhocks by

the garden seat were drooping, the nasturtiums were black with frost, shadows were flitting over the sea, the clouds were darkening, the sunshine was fitful.

The blinds being drawn the window was closed. The same cautious hand that opened the chamber lattice now undid the shutters of the house place and let in the daylight upon a fire that was still burning. Harry stirred it. He was in his shirt-sleeves. He looked round for the kettle, went into the backyard, filled it and hung it upon the bar over the fire. Very prosaic and common all this after the sunset, the twilight, the flickering shadows on the wall, the romance of the night before! Crime, villainy, deceit, profligacy, have all their mean common sides.

Elmira now peered at the morning from her window, and saw the same scene that Harry had contemplated, but with different eyes and different thoughts. She began saying good-bye to it; she

knew she was looking upon it for the last time for many years, perhaps for ever. The sentiment touched her for a moment, and she felt a pang of remorse when she thought of her father. She was very quiet, moved about the room with a sense of whispering. While she dressed she laid aside certain things of apparel for packing.

Harry had roughed it many a time on hunting expeditions, and he had lived under canvas, but he felt the vulgarity of this morning's pic-nic. He washed at the pump in the yard, made his toilette generally under miserable conditions, found himself actually tidying the room, pushing the grey ashes under the fire-grate, and brushing some crumbs from the kitchen table. He had the heart to wish himself at Ormesby Hall or in his snug rooms in town. For a moment ne longed to recall yesterday, and was sorry for all that had happened, not for Elmira's sake, but as the profligate surfeits with possession.

Then he heard Elmira descending the stairs. He stepped aside, and went for his coat. When he returned she was feeding a robin that had perched upon the window sill. She might have been the veriest saint, to look upon—and oh, the pity of it! There was an expression of melancholy in her drooping eyes. Her brown hair was gathered up at the back of her small head. She wore a light print dress, with short sleeves, and belted in at the waist. A simple brooch fastened the dress at her neck. She was unusually pale, but her lips were red, and they seemed to pout with a half-grieved waywardness that was tenderly expressive, inviting sympathy.

Harry took both her hands in his and kissed her white forehead, with an incongruous air of respect and reverence.

"Good morning," she said, "the robins are coming, it will soon be winter."

A few light particles of snow fell as she spoke.

"We will go where the sun shines always," said Harry, "and where the robins are nightingales."

"But first to London, you said?"

"Yes, dear, to London first."

Elmira began to busy herself with her domestic duties. Mrs. Charity Dene being out of the way, Harry saw Elmira in an entirely new light. She went about her work in a simple graceful way, a little self-conscious, but as one who brought an artistic charm even into the commonplace business of preparing breakfast. Harry tried to help her, fetching and carrying in a useless way, and finally sitting in a corner of the ingle-nook and admiring his little wife, as he called her, adding, "For you are, dear, just as surely as if we had pledged ourselves to each other in church or chapel."

After breakfast they walked across the dunes, away from beaten tracks, and all day long the

snow fell at intervals between bursts of sunshine. At sunset Harry Barkstead's man arrived with a light cart and carried away Elmira's trunks; and during the night, the snow hushing the tread of their horses' hoofs, Harry and Elmira posted to London.

CHAPTER V.

THE COUNTRY BEAUTY IN TOWN.

ELMIRA WEBB had not over-estimated her personal attractions. Unsophisticated as she was in regard to London life, with no practice in coquetry, except upon such gallants as came in her way down in Norfolk, she had nevertheless pictured herself the leader in some such set of London belles and beaux as Harry Barkstead had described to her. She expressed no surprise at the London streets, the gay equipages, the liveried servants, the wonderful shops, the aristocratic bearing of the West End crowds. Anyone might have thought she had been accustomed to such

sights and such society all her life. She shopped and discussed millinery with the most fashionable modistes and with perfect *sang froid.* On her first night at the opera she created a sensation among the set in which young Barkstead was a *persona grata.* Harry was both proud and jealous of the admiration she excited. Elmira was apparently innocent of the fact that she divided with the prima donna the attention of a large proportion of the boxes.

The town was quite taken with the new beauty, so fresh, and young, and striking. Elmira surveyed the house with well acted indifference, but her heart beat fast and furiously with a sense of triumph. The old house at Caister, and Zaccheus, her father, were for the time being forgotten. She never once remembered David Keith. Harry Barkstead little thought what a handful of trouble he had undertaken in bringing the country beauty to London.

She received every visitor with a gracious ease and unaffected geniality that captivated both men and women. Her one object in life seemed to be to give pleasure to all who came within the range of her personal magnetism. Every man thought he had made a deep impression upon her; every woman confessed that the country girl was at any rate modest and unaffected. Lord Grennox was smitten to the very thing he called his heart. He was double Barkstead's age, and had ten times his wealth. He was a married man, but his wife was very complaisant, and "received" in a very miscellaneous way.

Lord Grennox visited Elmira's box twice during the evening, and insisted upon Barkstead bringing Mademoiselle to Beulah House, which Harry did on the very next day, not that he was anxious to do so, but Elmira would not let him rest until he had responded to his lordship's invitation. Lord Grennox was notorious for his amours. He

was, nevertheless, a leader in the fashionable world, even a favourite at Court. Lady Grennox was one of the most charitable women of her time, foremost in every benevolent work. Grennox himself was popular at White's and Boodle's, and he had been known to give a voluntary advantage to a bad loser when play ran high at Crockford's. On the whole, he was what men called a good fellow, and women, "a very dangerous man, my dear". He knew as little about virtue and cared less than most men of his class in the fashionable world of his time; not that the age in which we live is over scrupulous in condoning social breaches of the moral laws that are supposed to govern Society. As there was half a century ago, and before then, and as there will be no doubt in the centuries to come, there is still a good deal of bowing to virtue and passing it by.

There were no half measures about thepeccadilloes of Lord Grennox.

Before Elmira had been in town a month she had taken leave of Harry Barkstead and sailed away to those continental cities of which he had told her under the protection of Lord Grennox. Why should she consider Harry Barkstead? He had not married her, nor did he intend to do so. She had not bound her life to his in any way. He had no claim upon her. He had not honoured her with his society for her pleasure but for his own. Lord Grennox had consented to settle upon her such an income for life as would make her independent of both his lordship and Harry Barkstead.

Elmira had accepted his lordship's proposals, and had obtained proper legal assistance to ensure the deed of endowment being properly executed and with *bona fide* trustees. She was a woman of business and in a very short time had met other women of business in the town who had given her good advice, and men of business

too, one of them having relations with Norfolk, and all of them possessed of the full knowledge of the immense wealth of Lord Grennox. She was a born adventuress, this Elmira of the east coast, a Pompadour, a Delorme, a Castlemaine, she held her own in the days when the young Queen Victoria was among the most delighted of the audiences at Her Majesty's and Drury Lane.

Though duelling was beginning to decline even among army men as a mode of satisfying wounded honour, it was sufficiently the mode to justify Harry Barkstead in sending a friend full speed after Lord Grennox with the demand of an immediate meeting. Society and certain journals that reflected the worst phases of its life and character found the disappointment of Barkstead a matter for much gossip and amusement; and of course it was taken for granted that the young Norfolk gentleman would not sit down tamely under the injury which he had suffered at the

hands of the gayest and cleverest Lothario of his time. Nor did Harry intend to do so; but meanwhile Fate had other business in store for the false friend who had matriculated for a reputation quite as scandalous as that of Lord Grennox.

Harry received a message from his father to go down immediately to Ormesby Hall on pain of disinheritance and other punishments. So, while his ambassador of war sped on his way to France and Italy, Harry Barkstead took the coach to Yarmouth, a prey to the varied passions of pride, hate, unrequited love (he still called his passion for Elmira love) and fears of bankruptcy. He had of late not only far exceeded in his expenses the liberal allowance of his father, but he had contracted financial responsibilities that he could not meet without a special grant, and his bills had begun to accumulate in hands the least reputable among money-lenders. What he most feared, however, was Sir Anthony's

anger over the affair of Elmira Webb. His father was rich enough to meet the financial claims that pressed upon him, and had rescued him from the accommodating Jews once before; but he had a personal regard for the smacksman of Caister, and might bitterly resent the seduction of old Webb's daughter. Harry's forecast of the agenda paper of his sins which his father—Justice Barkstead, as the common people called him—had prepared against him was beside the mark.

CHAPTER VI.

"SIR, YOU ARE A BLACK-HEARTED SCOUNDREL."

It was winter at Ormesby Hall when Harry Barkstead arrived. He had half a mind to call on Mrs. Longford-West before facing his father. A passing thought of the girl Jessie, however, held him back. He did not know what might have happened at the Lodge since his interview with Mrs. Cooper. He had a sneaking feeling of regard for Mrs. Longford-West, badly as he had treated her, and felt no doubt that when he had got through with his father he would be able to obtain the widow's forgiveness for his latest freak. He called it a freak now, his running

off with David's sweetheart, counting in his reckless way the heart-break of Zaccheus as nothing more than the misery he had brought upon David his friend. As for his father—well, Sir Anthony had been a young man once, and that must be his answer; at all events he had not disgraced the name of Barkstead by marrying some loose woman, he had made no *mésalliance*, his name was still clear from social disgrace. He was seriously in debt, and had raised money at a ruinous interest, but every young fellow of means, pretensions and prospects had done that.

"I am glad you saw the propriety of an immediate response to my summons," said Sir Anthony on receiving Harry in the library at Ormesby Hall.

Sir Anthony spoke with his judicial manner. He looked upon his son for the time being as a culprit. Sir Anthony had dressed himself for the occasion. He wore his tightest brown coat,

his most severe stock, and his bunch of seals rattled on his thigh as he stood before the blazing fire and contemplated his handsome but dissipated son.

They were in strong contrast, the two men.

Harry was pale, his eyes sunken, his manner nervous. He had suffered mentally of late as well as physically.

His father was short in stature, thin, wiry, his complexion brown and a trifle ruddy, his hair iron grey, his manner alert, though firm, his resolutions, whatever they might be, fixed and settled.

Harry gave back to him his defiant gaze, but Sir Anthony's eye was the most steadfast of the two. He spoke in a hard set way.

"Harry Barkstead," he said, "you are on the road to perdition; you have resisted every check that good advice and parental affection have offered to you."

"I am sorry, sir, to have so gravely offended you," said Harry.

"It is a hard thing to say, but it is just as it is true. Your ill conduct shortened the days of your mother."

"Yes, that *is* a hard thing to say," Harry replied.

"But it is a harder thing to have justified it. You have since then made a convenience of my affection. You have used me. You have disregarded my views for you; you have made light of my opinions; you have looked upon me as you might upon some cheap money-lender; and when you could trade upon my weakness no longer, without a truce, you have come down here and pretended a filial duty you have never felt, and submitted to a companionship you have not cared for."

"My dear father, you wrong me; I am a bad lot, no doubt, but I have always had a deep and ntense regard for you, and a true respect and gratitude for your kindness."

"There was a time when words such as those would have weighed with me; they do so no longer; words are all very well; but deeds, they are the test of affection, they are the tokens of filial love, deeds my son, deeds! And what are your deeds? There are profligates and profligates, spendthrifts and spendthrifts. In your profligacy I find no redeeming feature; you are a common seducer and a liar!"

"Father!" exclaimed the son, pale with suppressed emotion.

"You have practised your villainies with a systematic guile and with a vicious disregard of every manly sentiment."

"By Heaven, Sir Anthony, I cannot listen to such language, even from you," said Harry.

"But, by Heaven, you shall listen," said Sir Anthony; "what sort of language did you use to entice Jessie Barnes from honour, peace, and happiness? Or were you content with mere

promises and flattery? I am told that these were not alone the artifices you used against the poor orphaned and sweet child. Sir, you are a black-hearted scoundrel! And by the Heaven you have the audacity to appeal to you shall make restitution!"

While Harry winced at the strength of his father's invective, he felt a certain amount of relief in the fact that the storm was likely to break upon the unimportant head of Jessie Barnes. It was evident that his father had as yet heard nothing of the affair of Elmira Webb. Nor had he; for truth to tell, no one cared to mention it to him. Most people in Yarmouth and all around Caister knew of it. Mrs. Longford-West had heard of it; but Sir Anthony was perfectly ignorant of what had taken place. It was nobody's business in particular to tell him, and nobody had ventured to tell him; even Zaccheus Webb had held his peace; to him the shock of

his girl's base ingratitude had come with a dull thud that left him more or less stupified. He had gone about his work with a lack-lustre eye, had returned the "good-days" of his friends and acquaintances with a nod and a melancholy smile, but had said nothing, except to Mrs. Charity Dene, and to her only a few words which he repeated with little or no variation—"She'll come hum, Mira will, but where's Mester David Keith?"

"What restitution?" asked Harry.

"Jessie Barnes," went on Sir Anthony, without heeding him, "was the daughter of a soldier who died for his country in the first American War; though only a private, he came of a good family; his enlistment was a piece of folly, not vicious profligacy, and he left a widow and one child. The widow was your mother's care until the poor woman's death; the child was brought up by her aunt, Mrs. Cooper, at Ormesby, where I gave her a cottage. Two years ago Mrs. Cooper

let her cottage and went to live at Filby Lodge, Jessie having grown into a pretty, gentle and lovable girl. Yesterday a child was born at the Lodge—you have done me the honour to make me a grandfather; you will add to that the further honour of giving me an honest woman for my daughter-in-law."

"I don't understand you," said Harry.

"You will marry this girl and settle down here as a gentleman."

"And be the laughing-stock of the whole county; why, you might as well marry your own cook!"

"Had I behaved to my cook as you have to this girl I would marry her, sir. And you shall marry the mother of your child, or you are no longer a son of mine."

"My dear father," said Harry, "that sort of speech might do very well for an affiliation case at the Sessions, but it won't do for me."

"Won't it, indeed! And in what respect are you different from the men who come before me as a magistrate in affiliation cases? They are brutes of the field, ignorant, lustful, poor, uninformed wretches with no control over their passions, no sense of the proprieties of life. Your crime against this girl—coming of quite as honourable a family as your own, remember that—I say your crime is infinitely worse than theirs; but, fortunately, your position enables you to condone it, to bring light out of the darkness, to make honourable restitution; and we will set an example to these poor people; we will show them that we do not preach one thing and act another; we will——"

"Oh, look here, sir," exclaimed Harry, seeing at a glance the effect of this humble conclusion to his career, and having no feeling whatever for Jessie or her child, "look here, sir, this thing is impossible! I am ready to confess that my

conduct has been wicked, and I am truly sorry that you have not a worthier son; but, marry the lodgekeeper's niece!—my dear sir, that is simply nonsense!"

"Indeed!" said Sir Anthony. "She is beneath your station, eh? If I consider her equal to mine I flatter myself that my record is an honourable one, and I might be forgiven if I felt proud of it. But yours! Why, you are not even honourable in your money affairs, let alone what you call 'affairs of the heart.'"

"Oh, curse it all, sir, I have heard enough; I am in no mood to be preached at as if I were a culprit about to be sentenced to be hanged. I know what I have done; I have said that I am sorry, and I am sorry; but I am not going to let my father in his dotage make a fool of me!"

"Oh, I am in my dotage, eh?" said Sir Anthony, "because I chalk out an honourable

course for you, because I am ready to forgive you on fair human conditions, because a poor girl is to be given the rank and position she has a right to at your hands, because I have the audacity to tell the son who broke his mother's heart, that he shall not drag his father's name in the gutter without protest, I am in my dotage! We shall see. Do you deny the charge made against you at Filby Lodge?"

"I deny nothing; I say I am sorry."

"Do you deny the paternity of Jessie Barnes's child?"

"No, and I say I am sorry."

"I will not remind you how you brought about the girl's ruin; it is a wicked story, and I repeat that there is only one way for you, and that is, to make the restitution I desire, and which no honourable gentleman, at the intercession of his father, would resist."

"And I say that I will not do it," Harry exclaimed, with angry defiance.

"And I say you shall," was the quick reply.

"And I say——"

"Don't dare to speak again," said Sir Anthony, stepping towards him.

"I will not be bullied, and I will not be bounced," said Harry, beginning to pace the room.

"I neither desire to bounce you nor to bully you," said Sir Anthony, stepping back to his former position by the fire, and standing stiffly, "I will give you time to consider—say till to-morrow."

"I require no time to consider," said Harry, "if I have not my dead mother's tenderness, at least I have her pride, and, by Heavens, I will not marry into the families of the Coopers and the Barneses."

"Then you leave this house, now and for ever; I disown you. You are no longer my son. Go, sir!"

"Very well," said Harry, striding out of the room, and leaving his father still standing firmly on the spot where he had delivered his uncompromising sentence.

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE FOR HARTLEY'S ROW.

JUST about the time that Harry Barkstead was entering the library at Ormesby Hall to meet his father, the London coach drew up at the Posting House in Yarmouth.

The two most unexpected passengers were David Keith and his father. They were unexpected at Hartley's Row for the reason that news of the loss of the "Morning Star" had the day before reached Mr. Petherick, and he had conveyed the information to Miss Mumford, who had ever since been in a state bordering on despair. Mr. Petherick had reason to believe that a boat

might have been launched with men who had been picked up, David with them.

Mildred Hope, in the spirit of her name, undertook to cling hard and fast to that possible boat. She told Sally that something in her heart whispered faith in this belief. Mildred, by prayer and precept, did all she could to encourage David's best friend to think of the boy as still alive. But Sally remembered that she did not wish David to go: that he only went to get money for that strumpet, Mira Webb; and so on; and nothing would comfort her; she knew her dear lad was gone, he was too good for this world, and so on.

It happened that the coach on this occasion had few passengers. Alan Keith and David alighted, the latter without being known. David was not expected, but he unwrapped himself and made himself known to the landlord and engaged a porter to see after his luggage. He did not stay

to introduce his father, who was enveloped in furs and comforters, a long, tall, strange-looking person, with grey straggling hair and bright eyes sunk deep in dark sockets.

"We will just have a little brandy, father, and then I will show you the way to Hartley's Row while I run over to Caister and fetch Elmira; it would never do, you know, if I did not go there first."

"I suppose not," said Alan, following him into the great glass bar flashing with bottles, decanters, and plate, a blazing fire enveloping them in its genial glow.

"Two brandies hot," said David, "and have you a gig?"

"Oh, yes," said the landlord, who had followed them into the bar.

"Will you put a horse into it, I want to drive over to Caister."

By the time they had drunk their brandy the gig was at the door.

"Excuse me a minute," said David. "Come this way, father," and he took the old man's arm and led him by a short cut to Hartley's Row. "You see the house in the corner?"

"Yes," said Alan.

"That's Sally's house; the one next is where Mildred Hope lives. Tell them I have gone to Caister to fetch Elmira. Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"Reight," said Alan, "eh, lad, I'll be reight enough, if I dinna scare Sally oot o' her seven senses."

David watched Alan enter the dear familiar house in the corner of the Row, and then darted back to the inn and jumped into the gig, which he drove with a beating and a joyous heart to Caister.

The wind was blowing with a shrewd chill air across the dunes. Here and there lay the remains of a heavy snow that had for weeks been thick

on the ground. The stunted and dragglèd reeds in the dykes shivered by the half-frozen water. But David felt his cheeks glow with warmth and delight. Everything was forgotten at the moment but the bliss in store for him. The happy days of his courtship seemed to pass before him in a sunny procession notwithstanding the wind and the shivering reeds, notwithstanding the grey of the ocean and the white patches of frozen snow. His shipwreck, and even his escape, the meeting with his father, his auspicious hours in Venice—he only recollected any of them for the sake of telling his story to Elmira.

When he reached the cottage he tied his horse to the garden gate and pushed his way to the front door. It was unlatched, and in he went.

"Hello!" he shouted, "dear old Zacky, there you are!"

"Aye, there I be, that's so," said old Webb, who was sitting by the fire in the house-place,

and doing nothing to all appearance but sitting there; he was not warming himself; he was not smoking.

"Are you not glad to see me?" said David, a trifle damped. "Why, what's the matter; where's your hand?"

"There he be Master Keith, I knawd yo'd come."

The smacksman took David's hand in a listless way, and looked up at him with a pair of sad melancholy eyes.

"What's wrong?" said David, "where's Elmira?"

"She'll come hum mek no doubt."

"Come home, why where is she?"

"That's what I kep asayin."

He reached out for David's hand. "I knawd yo'd come, sea do spare some on us, spar'd me all these years."

Then he resumed his former listless manner and looked into the fire.

David felt his heart sink as it had sunk when

he knew that the "Morning Star" was about to founder. He looked round the room and noticed that it had lost its former bright and cheerful appearance. The hearth had not been swept up. The windows were not shining. The curtains were draggled. On the dresser was left the remains of the breakfast things. The flower pots on the window sill were dirty and the plants in them were withered.

"Zaccheus," said David, almost in a whisper, "what has happened? Where is Elmira?"

"She mought come hum to-day and she mought stop till Sunday; it be hard to say; I reckon we mun wait."

"Is there anybody else here but you?"

"We'n had some winter and fishin's been mortal bad; but we mon't complain; we'n be ole reight agen when Mira comes hum."

"My God!" exclaimed David, trembling with suspense and fear, "where is she? What has

happened? Listen Webb, wake up, what's the matter with you, wake up!"

David slapped the old man on the shoulder. He might as well have struck a post. The smacksman turned and looked at David and smiled with such unutterable sadness that tears welled up into David's eyes and he staggered to a seat.

"Ah it's a mortal grief!" said Zaccheus, seeming to realise for the first time David's anxiety, "a mortal grief, better yo'd deed."

"Hush! What is the grief?" David asked sobbing as he spoke, "tell me, Zacky, is she dead? Elmira, our Elmira? Oh my God, I shall go mad!"

The old man watched the distracted lad stagger to the window and look out as if he were looking for a grave. Then he returned to where the old man sat and dragged a seat by his side.

"Zacky, dear old fellow, something awful has occurred, what is it?—where is Elmira?"

The old man laid his hand upon David's arm

and then suddenly rose up with a cry and tramped about the room in his great boots making the place shake.

"Tell me," said David following him, "tell me."

But Zaccheus simply sat down again and sighed, and laid his hand once more upon David's arm.

"Is there no one in the house?" David asked in a loud voice and going to the staircase to repeat the question, when he heard some one moving above, and his heart beat wildly; but it was only Charity Dene who came down the stairs.

"Oh Lord, good gracious me!" she exclaimed, "well I never, and they said yesterday in Yarmouth you was drowned, well, well!"

"What is the matter here?" David asked.

"With the master? this is his queer day, he's regular daft a-Saturdays, it was a-Saturday when he come hum and found as she'd gone."

"Who'd gone?" asked David as well as he

could, with a dry tongue that clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Why, Elmira of course?" said Charity Dene.

"Gone? where?" asked David.

"Why gracious me, don't you know all about it, should ha thowt everybody know'd by now."

"But you see I have only just returned," said David, trembling as if he had been struck with a palsy.

"Why of course what a fool I be for sure; she'n been gone more'n a month, six weeks I dessay; went off wi' young Barkstead to London."

"Woman, what do you mean?" said David staggering to the stairway and gripping the doorpost.

"What do I mean? Why, eloped I suppose; they took their luggage and went wi' post-horses."

"Married?" David asked presently."

"Lor! not as I knows on," said Charity Dene, "but there I mun get mester his tea, will yo stay and ha, some wi' him? it ud be a comfort to him,

he is that lonely nobody takin' no notice on him except Miss Hope as looks in once in a blue moon to sit wi' him and once or twice have tea; but you looks very white, ain't you well?"

"Not very," said David pushing past her and into the garden.

"Let me think," he said, "Lord have mercy upon me!"

He sat in the seat beneath the figure-head of the wrecked East Indiaman, his hand upon his heart as if to keep it in its place. Suddenly he rose up and walked out upon the dunes and down by the sea. After awhile he felt better and returned to the house.

"Did she go of her own free will?" David asked, the woman answering him while she was cutting bread and butter, the tea things being already laid.

"Oh yes."

"Did he visit her here for some time first?"

"Constant; he was alevs a-hanging about after her."

"Did Zaccheus know?"

"Well, he were afishin' most of the time, and when they went off together yo see he'd been caught in gales and 'ad to put into somewheres or other and was delayed, and young squire Barkstead he were a bould wooer that he were!"

"Oh, curse you!" exclaimed David, "damn you!"

"Well I'm sure," said Mrs. Dene, "yo'd better mend yore manners, young man, I'm thinking."

She turned about to fling this remark at her questioner, but he was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

SURPRISES FOR HARTLEY'S ROW.

"BEG pardon, are you Miss Mildred Hope!" asked a tall, strange man, encumbered with a fur coat and cap, and speaking with a curious Scotch accent.

Alan Keith as he entered the bright particular corner where Sally's green shutters, white blinds and brass knocker gave distinction to Hartley's Row, came upon Mildred shutting her own door, and about to walk over to Sally's.

He had heard so much of both women and the locality of their two dwellings, that he could not have mistaken the trim, dainty little figure of the Prison Visitor.

"Yes," she said, "that is my name."

"We're weel met," replied the stranger, "I hae news o' your freend, David Keith."

"Oh, have you?" was the quick reply in which there was a mixture of hope and apprehension, "is it good news?"

"Aye, I'm glad to say it is."

"Thank God!" Mildred exclaimed, with fervour.

"Ye had ill tidings, I'm thinkin'?"

"Yes, oh yes, the news came yesterday."

"What news?"

"The loss of the 'Morning Star'."

"Weel, that's true enough; but our David was saved."

"You don't know what a blessed messenger you are!" said Mildred.

"Yet I dinna undervalue the tidin's I bring; I suppose yere thinkin' o' Sally Mumford, eh?"

"Yes," said Mildred, "but who are you, sir, may I ask?"

"I'm telt ye're a God-fearin' little woman, a releegious lassie, one who can stand firm in joy or sorrow?"

"I am a humble servant of Christ," said Mildred, "but only a poor creature."

"I am Alan Keith," said the stranger; "David's father."

"You are proclaiming miracles!" exclaimed Mildred, starting back a pace or two.

"Weel, I dinna ken but what you're reight! And it seems to me it's just providential that I met you i' this promiscuous way, for the reason that I want you just to go into that hoose wi' the brass knocker, and acquaint Sally Mumford wi' the fact that not only is David alive, was lost and is found, but that his father is alsae in the land o' the livin', and when she's in a condition to see me, I'll step in and assure her o' my reality."

"Yes, yes; oh, you are very thoughtful—and David, where is he?"

"Oh, he isna far away," said Alan, with a grim kind of wink that was intended to be humorous, "there was jest a person he had to see oot yonder; but he'll nae be lang—and noo, Miss Hope, gae and prepare the way for me and my gude tidin's."

"I am rather bewildered," said Mildred.

"You're a bonnie lassie," said Alan, "for a preachin' lassie your'e just a marvel o' sweet looks and a'most sweeter voice; besides it's vera cauld; gae in lassie, and when Sally's equal to seein' guests and the like come ye to the door."

Alan stood in the little court for some time noting its clean red bricks, its raddled pots filled with greenery, notwithstanding the nipping frosts of winter. Stray beams of sunshine glinted in upon him. Then the wind would rush round an adjacent corner and ruffle the grey fur of his coat collar, as if it had some business of identi-

fication on hand and was going to carry the strange news out to sea.

Presently Mildred in a soft, dove-coloured dress came to the door and Alan followed her into the house.

A pinched, red-eyed old lady met him almost on the door step, and then recoiled as he put out his hand.

"Heaven support me," she exclaimed, "how you must have suffered!"

"And ye luke as if ye'd had nae vera gude time yersel'!" was Alan's calm reply.

"Oh dear, dear, your poor grey hair, and your hollow cheeks! Oh, my dear, kind, abused master!" Sally went on kissing his hands and weeping over them.

"My dear Sally, ye were once as buxom and fresh as a rose, but there I canna tell ye hoo glad I am to see ye!"

"Dear master, my poor, kind, brave master,"

went on Sally, "and you've seen David your son! Merciful God, how mysterious are Thy ways!"

"Aye" said Alan, "come noo sit ye down, Sally, my lass, and I'll jest tek off these overpowering wraps that David would load me wi', fear I'd be tekkin cauld, the dear thoughtfu' lad that he is!"

"I will return by and by," said Mildred, who felt herself in the way, and was anxious to leave Sally and her old master to unburden their memories to each other in private.

"No, my love, doant thee go; eh my dear master, you don't know what a comfort she's been to me."

"Oh yes I do, David's telt me all about Miss Hope," said Alan, removing his wraps and standing forth in the quaint Oriental garb that he had worn in Venice. He looked ten years younger now that his figure was more or less free from incumbrance; the same hatchet face, the same

strong, well-shaped nose, the deep sunken eyes, the masterful if gentle expression that had attracted the artistic Venetians when first they saw him. Mildred felt awed in his presence; he was different from any other man she had seen; he seemed in her untutored imagination like a prophet out of the Bible.

Sally could only sit down and stare at him and sigh and wonder, until, her first surprise and amazement over, she asked for David.

The same grim effort at optical humour that had startled Mildred, was Alan's response.

"But where is he?" asked Sally, "did he come with you?"

"Aye, he did, we came by the coach frae London."

"Yes?" said Sally, "and then?"

"Why he bade me come on here and prepare the way for him, while he went on a little business of his ain."

The same wink, with the same ludicrous results.

Then it suddenly dawned upon Mildred that David had gone to Caister. She glanced at Sally, who read her thought, and started to her feet.

"Dear master, don't say he has gone to Caister!"

"There's a person named Webb lives at Caister, eh?" was Alan's response, but this time the wink was checked half-way, by an expression of terror that distorted the face of Sally Mumford, which had already been worn into a permanent expression of pain and sorrow.

"Oh, where did he say he was going?" asked Sally.

"To see his sweetheart, and bring her here to complete our family party," said Alan.

"Oh, dear, dear!" exclaimed Sally, bursting into tears, and hiding her head in her apron.

"Nae, there's something wrang!" said Alan, looking from Sally to Mildred, who had turned pale, but stood as stiffly as a statue gazing at Alan.

"Yes," she said, her lips trembling.

"What is it?"

"Elmira is no longer worthy of David," said Mildred.

"How? Why?"

"She has forgotten him and herself," said Mildred.

"Dinna beat aboot the bush; I had begun to think he was too happy, that I was too happy," said Alan with a sigh, and stooping as he spoke like a man in the attitude of bending his back to a blow.

"She has gone away, with a young man called Harry Barkstead."

"Good God! he was David's best friend."

"David thought so," said Mildred.

"She has left her father and her home, and is living with David's friend?" asked Alan, turning his deep set eyes upon Mildred.

Mildred simply said "Alas!" and looked upon the ground.

Alan thrust his long fingers through his thin wisps of hair, dragged a chair towards the inglenook, sat down, and looked into the fire, in an attitude similar to that in which Zaccheus Webb was sitting when David found him.

"Disgraced hersen, as weel as been untrue to David, is that what ye say?" he asked, staring at the cracking wood and coal.

"I fear so, led away by a designing and wicked man," said Mildred.

"His friend!" said Alan, "his friend! It will hurt David; please God it be nae a mortal hurt. His mither was an angel—is an angel—I lost her; death took her. Poor David! This Elmira Webb was his heart and soul, his life and hope and ambition—and he's lost her, and there's a loss that's worse than death! What'll he do? If they meet there's but one thing he can do. His mither ow'd her death to villainy and perse-

cution, they jest broke her heart; but I smote them, hip and thigh—aye, I did!"

"Sir," said Mildred, facing Alan as he rose up and began to put on his cloak, "David is a man of peace."

"Is he! Let me tell ye, then, that David's a man o' war! A life for a life; will ye deny him a righteous vengeance?"

"'Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord, I will repay,'" answered Mildred; and Sally, taking Alan's hand, leaned her head upon his arm and continued to weep and sob.

"Forgie me, I amna used to be amang women; I'm just bragging like some waster, besides forgettin' a' the misery that belongs to what's ca'd tekkin the law into one's ain hands; but ye hae telt me the saddest news I hae heard for more'n twenty year. It sets my auld heart beatin' like a blacksmith's hammer; I mun gae into the air. Moreover I mun find David. How will I get to Caister? He hired him a gig."

"I will show you," said Mildred. "May I go with you?"

"If ye'll gae noo."

"I will," said Mildred, tying her bonnet under her chin and wrapping her thick grey cloak about her.

"I canna be left, I mon't be left here," said Sally, "take me wi' ye. But, for David's sake, you shouldn't be sorry about Elmira Webb; she were a bad lot at heart. I nivver liked her."

"Eh, but David worshipped her," said Alan.

"Take me to David," said Sally, "I must go."

Mildred ran upstairs for Sally's shawl and a great muff that David had bought her, and a boa for her neck, and they went forth as the wintry sun was being blown out by a north-west wind that was beating up into a gale.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE NORFOLK INN.

THERE was snow in the gale.

The first feathery messengers were flying about in the air. Across the sea was marching the vanguard of the wintry storm.

Neither David nor his friends heeded the cold. Nor did Harry Barkstead, who was riding into Yarmouth from Ormesby Hall, pondering his plans and cursing his fate. He rode the same mare that had borne him proudly along to Caister on that bright autumn day, when he galloped to his conquest of old Webb's daughter; but the steed did not know her master on this occasion.

He rode her with the reins lying loosely upon her neck. She shambled along in a lazy leisurely fashion that was very much out of keeping with her customary gait, and also quite out of harmony with the day, not to say utterly uncharacteristic of the rider.

The stubbles, where the gunners had tramped after their game, and made blue wreaths of smoke above the browning hedges, were now flecked with weeds and dotted here and there with snow. The trees were bare. The roads were hard with frost. The toll-house doors were close shut. The sun made feeble efforts against the grey clouds and the northern wind that was driving them up from the sea attended by light flakes of snow that went about in a weird dance, some of them rushing into Harry's face without even making him wince, or without giving him the satisfaction that snow might have brought to a feverish brow.

Harry's thoughts were not retrospective.

His motto was that the past was done with; the future had to be taken care of.

What was he going to do? Should he return to London at once? Or should he stay at the Norfolk in the hope that his father might relent and send for him? That was rather a forlorn hope at present he confessed, seeing that his father had not yet heard of his latest escapade, had not evidently seen old Webb, or been told the story of Elmira's departure from Caister, let alone her trip to the Continent with Lord Grennox. Of course, now that the floodgates of gossip would be opened against him, Sir Anthony would at once be made acquainted with the story of Elmira Webb.

Anyhow Mr. Barkstead came to the conclusion that he would stay for the night at the Norfolk; and having got this tiny distance on the highway of the future he touched the horse with his spurs, took up the reins, and cantered into Yarmouth,

not taking his customary road whence he could see old Webb's cottage, but going by a more roundabout route that took him into Yarmouth from a different point.

While Harry Barkstead, fresh from his father's denunciations, was riding towards the Norfolk, David Keith in a far more energetic mood was driving in a similar direction.

As David had swept along the highway among the sand-dunes to Caister he fairly laughed for joy. He had almost been unable to contain himself while anticipating his meeting with Elmira and the blundering congratulations of Zaccheus. He had even thought of the delight it would be to Charity Dene to see him once more in the old house, this time with his arm rightfully about Elmira's waist.

Then he had thought of how Elmira would get into the gig and sit by his side, and how they would drive triumphantly into Yarmouth, and he

would watch the expression of his father's face when introducing his beautiful girl, as he said to the old man "This is Elmira."

There was surely never a happier fellow than David on his way to Caister; never a more wretched one as he drove back again to Yarmouth. Now he groaned in his desolation, bit his lips with vows of vengeance, cursed Harry Barkstead beneath his breath as if he hissed his anathemas, but found no word or thought of rebuke in connection with Elmira. Of course the scoundrel had followed her about and pestered her with his attentions, loaded her with presents, made love to her at every opportunity, taken advantage of her when her father was away, and when she might have thought that he (David) was drowned. He made every excuse for Elmira, he saw in Harry the worst villain that mind could conceive or imagination invent.

The light in David's eye was murderous, his

lips drawn over his strong teeth, his face livid. The snow wetted his cheeks as it wetted Harry Barkstead's, and with as little feeling or notice as it drew from him. The wind howled across the dunes. Now and then a streak of sand like a winter wraith fled across the way, and a flight of gulls from the sea cried out against the coming storm. The licensed victualler's horse galloped along the hard road as if the fiend was behind it, though David neither touched it with whip nor urged it with rein.

Was it something in the fixed destinies of David Keith and Harry Barkstead that allotted to their horses the very paces at which they should travel that the two men might meet as they did? Coincidences are supposed to be the chief motives of a fictitious story; but they are far more remarkable in the history of real life than anything the novelist can invent. There was nothing in the least unlikely or improbable in these

two young fellows crossing each other at this momentous period of their two young lives.

While Alan and the two women of Hartley's Row were making enquiries and procuring a carriage at the Norfolk, David was speeding along the North Road and so into the market-place; and as he entered it at one end Harry Barkstead rode in at the other. The snow by this time was beginning to fall with a persistance that was only held in check by the wind.

It was not strange that Harry did not notice David, whom he had come to regard as dead whenever he gave him a thought. The moment David saw the unmistakable figure of his whilom friend, he pulled up his horse and leapt to the ground.

"Here, my lad," he said to a fellow who was standing in an adjacent archway, "take this horse."

"Yes, sir," said the man, stepping to the horse's head.

"Take the trap to the Posting House, and say I'll be there directly."

"Yes, sir," said the man, holding out his hand for the shilling that David drew from his pocket.

Pleased with his bright new coin and proud of sitting behind any kind of a horse, the man rattled away across the stones towards the house by the quay, and David walked with a steady, firm step to the Norfolk, where Harry was alighting from his horse, the Norfolk's groom leading it in beneath the archway where there was a private entrance to the Bar.

Suddenly Harry was pulled up by a hand that took him by the shoulder and turned him round. Recognising that the grip was not a friendly one, he raised his heavy riding whip and found himself in a threatening attitude face to face with David Keith.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, with a surprised look, and stepping back a pace or two.

"Yes; who did you think it might be?" David asked, getting between Harry and the bar door.

"It might have been a Bow-street runner who had mistaken me for some other villain," said Harry, re-arranging the collar of his coat.

"I'm glad you confess yourself a villain," said David; "it will save time and explanations."

"Will it?" said Harry, backing still further into the yard under the influence of David's aggressive attitude.

"Where is Elmira Webb?" asked David, steadying himself, for it was an effort to mention her name.

"I don't know," was the answer flung back, with something of the defiant and threatening manner in which the question was put.

"You lie!" said David.

Harry tried hard to stand firmly on the defensive and to give David back retort for retort, but the weakness of his cause hampered him. The

knowledge of his infamous conduct *quâ* this honest, trusting lad unnerved him.

"I ask you again, where is she?"

"I repeat I do not know."

"And I say again, you are a liar and a coward," said David, his rising passion flushing his pale cheeks.

Harry merely shrugged his shoulders, but he turned his heavy whipstock round and held its handle downwards.

"Do you remember how we parted, you and I?" David asked, his lips trembling.

"Yes, I remember, and to that memory you owe it that I have not laid you flat with this whip; I tell you now I am no more a liar than you are, and you can easily find out if I am a coward."

"All in good time," said David. "You knew when we parted that she was engaged to be my wife?"

"I don't deny it."

"And you professed to be my friend."

"I did, and felt like it at the time."

"Really!" said David, his lips paling with the scorn they expressed, "really!"

"It is the truth," said Harry.

"You knew that I risked that journey chiefly for her happiness, you knew that it consoled me to think that she would have a friend at hand if she wanted one, a friend whom I could trust; the friend who went all the way to Bristol with me to say 'Goodbye,' and take my last messages back to her and the others whom I loved."

David seemed as if he would break down under the influence of his more tender feelings; his eyes filled with tears. Harry thought the moment opportune to offer explanations.

"She was not worthy of you," he said.

"Who was her tutor?" David asked, dashing the tears from his face. "Who in the absence of

her only protector, her honest old father, stole her away from home and honour?"

"Not I," said Harry, now advancing towards David, "I'm tired of these useless recriminations, and it is cold standing out here; besides, the people in the bar are becoming interested; and it is a pity you should make an exhibition of yourself."

"Answer me! Do you think I care who hears what I have to say."

"Who stole her away!" said Harry, repeating David's question with a sneer and stiffening his lip at the remembrance of his own grievance against the girl, "stole her away! Why she was any man's goods who'd money enough."

David was stunned with Barkstead's bitter and cowardly reply of justification. Vilifying the girl he had deceived to the friend whom he had wronged was the climax of outraged friendship and honour.

"Coward!" hissed David, approaching him as if about to spring upon him, "liar, thief, blackguard!"

"Out of my way, you fool!" exclaimed Harry, clutching his loaded whip as he found David once more blocking his road to the bar door and with a new light of danger in the lad's eyes. Harry both boxed and fenced, and he watched David's movements with the practised skill of one who knew how to take advantage of the smallest mistake arising from passion or lack of art.

At the moment that David reached out his long arm with the intention of seizing Harry by the throat the other evading his touch, struck him a tremendous blow with the handle of his whip.

David fell back against the door, half-blinded with a rush of blood from a wound on the forehead. The bleeding was a relief. An open wound at the moment was better for David than a heavy bruise.

Barkstead, his passion now hot, and his false pride awakened, advanced upon David to remove him.

"Out of my way, I tell you," he said, and the sound of his voice was like a trumpet to the half stunned faculties of his antagonist.

Crouching like a tiger and with a wild cry David sprang at his enemy, hitting him full in the face and catching with his left hand the whipstock that Harry had once more raised against him.

There was a sharp, fierce struggle, a desperate effort each to fling the other, and from which David emerged with Harry's bludgeon-like weapon in his right hand. As his foe gathered himself up David swung the whipstock above his head and struck his enemy across the face, and followed up the blow with another and another.

Sir Anthony's wretched son staggered and fell. Losing all control over himself, David rushed

upon him, picked him up, flung him down again, and kicked the resistless body before the people in the bar—who knew the nature of the quarrel—had thought it right to interfere.

It took half-a-dozen men to hold the lad. He was the picture of wild despair and madness, the blood streaming down his pale face, his clothes torn, his lips wet with blood and foam, his hands clutching the empty air, but gradually becoming limp as his body until he sank into the arms of his father, whom, in his fury, he had no more recognised than he had Mildred or Sally, who arrived on the scene just in time to witness the close of the tragedy.

Harry Barkstead was taken up dead.

CHAPTER X.

THE WATCHMAN'S LANTERN.

HARRY BARKSTEAD lay dead in the club-room of the Norfolk Inn.

At one end of the room two pillars, representing two orders of architecture, stood for masonic symbols.

It was the room in which a body of Freemasons met once a month to perform their mysteries.

Once a year the county ball was held there. Elmira Webb had often stood outside the famous old tavern to see the fine ladies go in. She was herself a fine lady now, the belle of a winter resort under the blue skies of Italy.

There was no other room, thought the landlord, so fitting for the body to rest in as the dim old club-room. It would be convenient for the jury to view the corpse, and handy for the undertaker, giving as it did directly upon the courtyard.

All the other rooms were more or less engaged. The club-room would not be required until New Year.

It did not matter to Harry Barkstead where his body might be lodged upon this occasion, though in his life he was fastidious, not to say luxurious, in his tastes.

In due course the hotel went to rest. Yarmouth closed its eyes.

The only wakeful person seemed to be the watchman, who, a lantern in one hand and a stick in the other, left his box at long intervals and announced the hour and the state of the weather.

"Twelve o'clock, and a snowy morning!" was heard that night by many unusually sleepless burgesses, but it made no impression upon Harry Barkstead; nor, indeed, was David Keith conscious of the watchman's cry. One lay dead, and—according to the latest accounts in bar-parlour and taproom—David Keith was dying.

It was not so, however. David, between white sheets, watched by loving eyes, tended by the best medical skill, lay unconscious in his own comfortable bedroom in Hartley's Row. It was a truckle bed, with white dimity curtains drawn at the head of it to shield the sleeper's face from the firelight and the candle that stood in a long round tin box with holes at the side, through which the light flickered in a furtive, sick-room kind of fashion.

Over the mantel there were three silhouette portraits, one of David, one of Sally, and one of Elmira Webb. Sally had not dared to take the latter down,

even when the news came to her of the flight of David's sweetheart with his trusted friend. She had determined that when David came back he should come to his own neat and daintily kept little room. There were his hanging bookshelf, upon which he kept certain favourite volumes, his oak chest containing sea shells, pebbles, a few old knives, a dagger, a flint pistol, a bit of the wreck of a ship lost off the North Dunes, and other curiosities. In the closet still hung the jacket he had worn on his expeditions in the "Swallow."

On the wall facing the foot of his bed were sundry florid and shining figures of various heroes cut in relief from printed pictures, coloured in red and purple and green and blue, and embossed with gold and silver tinsel, giving the effect of splendid armour. William the Conqueror with a powerful battle-axe was defying the Black Prince in iron spangles and flourishing

a gigantic sword. There were also representations of Julius Cæsar, Robin Hood, and "King Dick," as Richard III. was invariably called by the gallant youth of Yarmouth in the youthful days of David Keith.

The firelight played in a friendly way on these familiar objects, but David neither saw them nor it. By the fire, as the watchman called the hour, sat a silent figure not unlike Don Quixote, grim, bony, with a long neck and rope-like sinews, bright deep eyes, a long face and a firm yet generous mouth half hidden behind a straggling moustache that was mixed up with his beard, a curious, thoughtful, kindly, strange looking old man. He was taking his turn with the women who were nursing the unconscious lad who lay calm and still with his head bandaged and his lips almost as pale as his face.

But as you will see David Keith was better off than Harry Barkstead. David did not know

that he was better off. At the time when the watchman cried the hour he might have been as dead as Harry Barkstead for all he knew; he was much better off nevertheless.

Alan, his father, sat lovingly and patiently at his beck and call when he should wake to consciousness. Moreover, he had a nice fire in the room; it was his own room. The old familiar dumb things he had known in his boyish days were waiting for his recognition; and below stairs one of his nurses in particular was young and loved him with the fervency of a first love; while the other, who had been to him as a mother, only wanted to be asked to lay down her life for him to do it cheerfully.

But Harry Barkstead was abed in his boots, in a cold cheerless room, the history of which was heavy with ghostly memories of Freemasons who had been torn limb from limb in olden days for broken vows; with ghostly memories

of bygone feats; with ghostly memories of dance and song and music from sweet lutes, and all kinds of sad and happy occurrences; no father sitting by, no sweet greetings awaiting his return to consciousness; dead as any of the masons of old who had handed down the passwords from the days of Solomon.

Harry Barkstead may perhaps be said to have been happy in one thing; at least he knew nothing of the junketings and fine doings of Lord Grennox and my lady Webb away in the sunny climes where such a night of snow and chill as had fallen upon Yarmouth was impossible; nor was he conscious of all the bitter scorn with which his father regarded his life and death. What Harry Barkstead's spiritual experiences might be it is not worth while to consider; but his mortal body was in a sorry state.

And outside of these two rooms—the club-room of the Norfolk and the chamber in Hart-

ley's Row—the snow fell in a steady downpour. There were no stars, and no sky was to be seen; hardly a light was visible in Yarmouth, except the occasional flicker of the watchman's lantern.

The snow fell all over the land. It came down in such heavy flakes that it even calmed the sea. All the world was hushed. The dunes were rounded hillocks Never indeed were they anything else, except when the wind sometimes blew them into imitations of miniature crags from which they soon fell again into their native shapes; but on this night of the tragedy at the Norfolk Inn they were rounded with snow, the valleys themselves climbing into hillocks, the hillocks covering every trace of rush and reed that had been browned by Autumn winds and torn by wintry gales.

Along the beach by Caister there was a light in the Look-out station, and your imagination might lead you to see the group of sturdy

fellows posted there, some lying prone on the benches, others sitting up and smoking their pipes, all ready to go forth to the aid of any ship that might be in distress. But who could go to the aid of that human ship that hung out its light on the Yarmouth side of the Look-out? Zaccheus Webb had his lamp burning to welcome the prodigal daughter, who without any thought of him was walking on flowers and basking in sunshine.

The poor old smacksman had heard nothing as yet of the death of Harry Barkstead. Curiously enough he had never once thought of him. From the moment that he knew his daughter had left Caister, no thought but of her entered into his mind. He blamed no one, desired no vengeance, did not dream of following his child, he was stunned with a great blow; and he sat down to wait for Elmira's return. "She'll come hum," he said, "Elmira will, all in good time; she'll come hum."

And the Watchman at uncertain intervals went forth from his shelter, muffled in comforter, laden with capes, with his slouched hat pulled down over his ears, and proclaimed the flight of time.

CHAPTER XI.

"THROUGH THE VALLEY."

THE deep, unredeemed shadows of the night that lay so heavy on the town dominated the morning and the evening of the next day. Nature seemed to be in sympathy with the gloom of the story that was being told not now in Yarmouth only but with variations along the coast; for ill news travels apace even with snow and darkness against it.

Yarmouth paused in the midst of her preparations for Christmas to listen to the details of the fight and to speculate upon the consequences thereof to David Keith. Shop windows in course

of decoration with festive fruits and toys were left half finished. The snow interposed, however, with the characteristic embellishment of white drift, and here and there the window-panes were decorated with frosted arabesques.

The waits postponed their rehearsals for the time being, and the street hawkers laid aside their sheets of carols in the hope of being provided with more attractive verses descriptive of the tragedy of the Norfolk Inn.

In the general details of the story wherever it was told the figure of Alan Keith loomed up strangely and weird. It was related how David's father had suddenly appeared on the scene, a foreign-looking stranger in foreign clothes, tall and gaunt-like, some queer mariner who had sailed the world round and round, to come at last to the east coast to find his lad in trouble and to stand by his side perhaps in death. They were by no means without imagination these

Eastern folk, and they could not get away from the unaccustomed spectacle of this picturesque and unusual old man.

The beadle was busy summoning the jurymen to sit upon the body. Sir Anthony Barkstead had listened to the account of the witnesses, who would be called at the inquest, and all Yarmouth was agreed that since Barkstead struck the first blow, and that a murderous one, David Keith had only acted in self-defence, and could not, therefore, be answerable for the death of his adversary. Mr. Petherick had endorsed this view; but one of the egotists of the Norfolk smoke-room declared without fear of contradiction that a man who took the life of another was guilty of manslaughter, even if that other was a highwayman.

Meanwhile David Keith lay unconscious of all that was going on around him, in the neat and trim little bedroom that had been daily aired and tidied in the hope of his return. No amount of

doubt, no rumour of storm and stress, no story of gales or shipwreck had influenced Sally Mumford in her preparations for the dear lad's home-coming. Her heart misgave her but she strenuously battled with her fears; while there was life there was hope, and come when he might, his room should be as ready for him as her welcome.

It was not deemed wise for more than one person at a time to be in the sick-room, seeing that pure air was helpful to the patient—so the doctor said. Miss Mumford, Mildred Hope, and Alan Keith therefore took it in turns to watch by the patient's side and carry out the doctor's instructions.

Alan Keith who had been at first regarded as somewhat eccentric turned out to be a very wise careful old man, gentle as a woman, and just as wise in the art of nursing. They grew to love him devotedly, both Sally and Mildred, so even tempered was he, so religious, so practical too,

and so reconciled to the will of Heaven. They could not see into the man's heart or they would have found it full of unorthodox approval of David's slaying of the man who had betrayed his friendship; but Alan's head came to the aid of his heart and he assumed a policy of gentleness, contending that his boy had no vengeful feeling, that he would have been satisfied with Barkstead's explanation if the young squire had vouchsafed him one, but since instead of that Barkstead had made a murderous assault upon him what was he to do but defend himself? Old Petherick had given Alan this judicial hint, telling him that David's safety, if he recovered, would lie in the absence of premeditation, and happily there was no evidence of any threat, and he had no weapon upon him when he encountered Barkstead. At the same time the law was very jealous of the taking of life, and it would need all the evidence and influence that could

be obtained in the lad's favour to save him.

The inquest was adjourned from day to day, until such time as David could make his deposition, for Petherick contended that his deposition should be taken, his policy being to regard David as the aggrieved person in the case although the other was dead. Magisterial opinion was rather for looking upon David as a person resting under a grave charge, and therefore not to be interrogated, and such police authority as existed, outside the borough watchman, held Sally Mumford's house under surveillance.

Mildred Hope found time between the intervals of nursing to attend to her duties of charity. Wherever she went she had good words for David, and she asked many of her humblest dependents to pray for him. Mildred plodded through the snow to the Toll-house gaol and read to the prisoners, went to Sunday school, visited the sick, and seemed to be endowed with fresh

energies and power. Whether he lived or died she had the privilege of smoothing David's pillow, and the only time since the moment when he fell into the arms of his father that he had seemed to know any one he had looked at her and touched her hand. She loved him, and now that he was sick and in trouble she had ventured to confess her love not to any human being but in her prayers to God. Mildred did not regard prayer in the common-place orthodox fashion of "Ask, and ye shall receive," but as a duty; not in the way of petition so much as for strength to do what was right, and as a vow to hold by; the expression of a wish that Heaven might think well to grant. She had been accustomed for years to speak on her knees of all that she wished and desired, of all that she felt that it was worthy to feel; and never until the bond between Elmira and David was broken had she confessed, even to herself, that she loved David

Keith; indeed, when she had been conscious of it, she had rather regarded it as a sin, and she repressed it, for were not his word and his heart given to Elmira Webb?

It is true she had listened to Sally Mumford, when David's foster-mother had declared she would like to have seen her engaged to David. She had striven, however, to discourage repetitions of Sally's opinions and desires in that direction. But now, although David might be drifting out with the tide to that last harbour, she was conscious of a mysterious joy; she dared to love him, she dared to say so in her prayers; she dared to lay bare her heart and pray that it might not be a wicked thing to do.

It was Mildred who had received Sir Anthony Barkstead when he called to inquire after David's condition. Sir Anthony was pale, and he spoke low and sorrowfully; but he said to Mildred, whom he knew as the prison visitor, and with

whose good work he was well acquainted, that he wished it to be understood that he did not blame David for what had happened. The law would take its course, and it was not for him to suggest what that course might be, but it was his wish, when the lad was well enough to be spoken to concerning what had happened, that he should be told how Harry Barkstead's father exonerated and forgave him.

The law did take its course. First there was the inquest, adjourned until David Keith should be out of danger. The body having been sufficiently viewed by members of the 'quest, Sir Anthony took it home to Ormesby Hall, where the poor, harmless, mortal thing was washed and laid out where its mother had reposed in the first days of her long sleep. And presently the stern, hard look of the misguided heir to an honoured name and a fine estate, relaxed, and Sir Anthony saw in the softened features the face of

his son as he had known it in its innocence, and before the funeral bell began to toll he was reconciled to the dead image of the child he had loved, and there were tears in his eyes, and his heart heaved as he followed it to the grave.

"But I must do my duty to that other one," he said, sitting down by his lonely hearth when the day was over.

First, as is set forth in the legal record of the case, came the inquest, its adjournment, and the burial of the body. Then came adjournment after adjournment, until David's deposition could be taken, and it was sworn with the fear of death before his eyes. Fortunately the few questions put to him were very simple, and his story was amply corroborated. While Mr. Petherick had no *locus standi* before the Court except by the courtesy of the Coroner, he was an important factor in formulating the evidence and drawing forth the points favourable to David. The accounts given

by the lookers-on who saw the beginning of the altercation, the first blow struck by Barkstead and the last by Keith, were very explicit, and tended not only to reduce the crime to manslaughter, but even to suggest the possibility of a verdict of justifiable homicide, though the law at the time was far more severe than it is now.

In the end, the jury, after some discussion as to the form and presentation of their verdict, gave it as manslaughter with extenuating circumstances.

The Coroner therefore issued his warrant for the arrest of David Keith. In response to this, medical evidence satisfied the authorities that David was not in a fit condition to be removed from Hartley's Row.

A few weeks later the case came before the magistrates. David was well enough to plead. The case was taken in the chief magistrate's room, a limited number of the public being admitted.

The evidence give before the Coroner was repeated, and the magistrates came to the conclusion that it was their duty to commit David for trial at the forthcoming assizes, but they were willing to take substantial bail for his appearance.

Sir Anthony Barkstead, to the surprise of everybody present, thereupon rose from a seat with which he had been accommodated apart from the magistrates' table, and offered himself as one of David's sureties, Mr. Waveny Petherick at the same time standing forward as another.

The sureties being in every way satisfactory, David was released to take his trial at the regular gaol delivery in March.

"Permit me to thank ye, sir, for your great kindness in this painfu' matter," said Alan Keith, approaching Sir Anthony as he was leaving the Court.

"I conceive it to be only an act of duty," was Sir Anthony's reply.

The two fathers bowed to each other and passed on their way.

Mildred had watched the magistrates' house from afar. She dared not trust herself in the court. When she saw David come forth with Miss Mumford, his father, and Mr. Petherick, and go towards Hartley's Row, many sympathisers following, she followed too, uttering little prayers of thankfulness that David was better and a free man. She had not reckoned upon a committal to the Assizes. On her way she met Mr. Petherick going to his office. He informed her of the magisterial decision.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, answering her sudden expression of anxiety, "he is sure to get off with a very light punishment, perhaps with no punishment at all; if you have to count him among the prisoners at the Toll-house gaol he will not need your visitations for long."

CHAPTER XII.

A BAD DREAM WITH A LOVELY IMAGE IN IT.

February had set in with unusual suggestions of an early Spring. Tufts of crocuses appeared in the flower pots that filled every one of the window sills of Miss Mumford's house in Hartley's Row.

Alan Keith had already begun to rise at an early hour, and take long walks, revolving in his mind his long cherished idea of visiting Newfoundland and unearthing his buried treasure.

By the banks of the Waveny, and through the meadows by dike and homestead, he had already heard the wood-lark and the thrush. Along the

beach the sea rolled in with a pleasant sound of promise. Fishing smacks came and went with every tide. On market days the stalls were brightened with the first flowers of the year, and the drying winds of March began to stir the dust long before February was at an end.

David was fast recovering.

It was noted by Sally Mumford with a grateful joy that he said nothing of Elmira. She almost hoped that the effect of his wound might have been to wipe old Webb's daughter entirely out of his memory. She had heard of such things happening as the obliteration of certain occurrences in the minds of men and women who had been badly hurt in fearful accidents.

As David improved in health, Mildred Hope became shy and reserved. He never failed to ask after her whenever she stayed away from the house more than an hour or two at a time. Sally declared the lad could not get along with-

out Mildred. Alan Keith had come to find the girl a necessity; she knew so many things, was so deft with her needle, so learned as to geography, and so generous and wise in her views of religion. Theology had of late become quite a serious subject with Alan. Furthermore, her charities were remarkable, considering that she was poor and had no settled organisation of work.

As for David, he seemed to be awakening from a dream. He mixed up the loss of the "Morning Star" with the incident of the Norfolk Inn. Old Matt White of the Welsh Back and Zaccheus now and then appeared to be the same person. Elmira Webb was something to pity, not to sigh for, a fairy of the mist who had mocked him to his shame, a something such as old Matt White might have seen when he beckoned and waved imaginary flags before he flung himself overboard to cool his burning face and find a lasting rest.

It was a bad dream with a lovely image in it, and a siren's voice that no longer pulled at his heart; and it might be that the tender eyes and calm, sweet face of Mildred Hope had already begun their eclipse of the bold, handsome, defiant countenance of Elmira Webb.

One day when Sally Mumford had designedly left David and Mildred alone in the house, Alan being at Gorleston discussing ships with a skipper almost as battered as himself, David asked after Zaccheus Webb.

David was sitting in an old arm chair by the fire. Mildred was embroidering a bodice for a county lady, in the interest of a poor little cripple of Caister. She was in one of her happiest moods, looked the picture of an honest, loving English maiden, small as to stature, as we know, but with soft grey eyes, rich brown hair, and a mouth made rather for love than for pious recluseship.

While he talked with her David looked mostly into the fire. Once in a way he turned to her as if to emphasize a question. Mildred answered him in a subdued voice. There was still between the two in manner more of the invalid and the nurse than belonged to the intercourse of neighbours and friends.

The old clock ticked regularly in an encouraging and soothing way, and the hot cinders dropped into the firepan beneath the grate with a drowsy influence that helped calm conversation.

"I had almost forgotten old Zacky. How is the poor old chap?"

"Quite well, bodily," said Mildred.

"Still waiting?" asked David, his mind, which had hitherto kept clear of the sad memory of his return to the cottage, now going back to it.

"Yes."

"For her?"

"Yes."

"Still sitting by the fire and saying she'll come home?"

"Yes."

"Poor old Zacky!"

"He rarely leaves the house."

"I can see him as I saw him that day, shattered, broken, a very sorrowful old man; it was not he who told me about her."

For the first time David mentioned Elmira.

"No?"

"It was that woman misnamed Charity."

This was the first harsh word she had heard him utter.

"She seems to be very kind to the old man," said Mildred.

"Yes?"

"I have been there very often and have always found her attentive to his wants."

"How good you are!" David answered, looking at her.

"It is easy to be good when there is so much misery about," said Mildred, bending afresh over her work.

"Easy for you to be good," said David, turning his face once more to the fire.

"You say truly," she answered, "it is easy for me to be good, but think of Mr. Webb, he is good yet his heart is breaking."

"Keener than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child," said David, "how true, how sad. I will go and see Zaccheus, we will both go."

"When you are well enough," said Mildred, "you have been reading Shakespeare?"

"A little; if Zaccheus only had a younger daughter to comfort him, he is childless you see, now."

David sank back in his chair and put his hand to his head. The blow that Harry Barkstead had struck him with his loaded whip was a terribly shrewd one, cruelly aimed, viciously given.

Perhaps Harry had noted the murderous light in David's face and meant to anticipate the lad's attack: David had had a very narrow escape of his life.

"You have talked too much," said Mildred, laying down her work to hand him a jar of salts which the doctor had recommended whenever David felt faint, and at the same time she reminded him that it was time he took the tonic that had been prepared for him.

David put out his hand, not to take the jar, but to clasp his long fingers over the white soft hand that held it.

"No, I am not faint, I am better, my memory is coming back to me in bounds, some things I am thinking of overcome me a little. Won't you sit by me, Mildred?"

"Yes, if you wish it," she answered, drawing her chair towards him.

He took her hand in his, pressed it gently,

and looked into the fire once more, not seeing how her colour came and went, not feeling the quick beating of her heart.

"Dear Mildred," he said, "you were good to her because I loved her; yes, I know it; you could not have loved her, I know you didn't; you were sorry for her, you tried to help her, you did it for my sake; nay, do not take your hand from me, Sally has told me."

"I never said so," Mildred answered.

"No, you never would have said it, I know that; I always knew you were good and generous, but never knew how good—how should I, a thoughtless, selfish, happy lad, without any experience of the world and its ways, how should I?"

"You were never selfish," said Mildred, "and youth is necessarily thoughtless; thought comes later with sorrow."

"What is your highest ambition, Mildred?"

"I don't think I quite know," was the reply.

"I begin to think I know mine," said David, "but what is yours, Mildred? My father was full of his yesterday, full of it, and if he does not dream, and I think he does not, he is a very rich man. He loves you Mildred, loves you, he says, as if you were his own daughter—and when I get free—if I do get free, Mildred—he wants to do something for your people, something to help you to fulfil your highest hopes, he wants, he says, to be providence to your prayers, to answer them with a full hand, so that you may give with lavish one."

"How he loves you!" said Mildred, "to think so much of your friend's ambition. But you said if you obtain your freedom? What do you mean?"

"Ah, my dear friend, you forget that I have yet to stand in the dock at the Assizes," said David, "and it does not need a Shakespeare to tell us of the uncertainties of the law, the scrip-

ture teaches us that—who knows, perhaps you may extend your prison ministrations to me!"

"Oh, David, you make my heart ache," said Mildred, suddenly, withdrawing her hand to cover her face, "they can never send you to such a place as that!"

"Mildred," he answered, turning towards her and bending his head over her, "it would be Heaven enough for me if you were there!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PATIENCE OF ZACCHEUS WEBB.

"YO'N a sight better this mornin'," said Charity Dene, "doan't say yo bain't."

"I dunno," said Zaccheus Webb, taking the seat that Mrs. Dene placed for him.

"You dunno, but I do; weather's took turn for better, yon old hunx o' your'n says; fishin's good likewise."

"Aye, shouldna wonder," replied Webb. "I dunno mek nowt much a what you be arter, Charity. You'n got news, eh?"

"Not about her, no news o' Mira: news of him."

"Who?" asked Webb, as he took the slice of

bread which Charity cut for him and laid a rasher of bacon upon it.

"Him as killed t'other wun."

"Aye, so he did, I'd forgotten; 'twere David made a boggert on him—think I seed un t'other night."

"Seed un? Seed who?"

"Boggert o' him as cum here and made off wi' Mira. They was reed-cuttin' at the time."

"Wish you'd go reed-cuttin' or summat," said Charity; "drink your coffee; I thowt yo was a-comin' to your senses, and you go maudlin' on wuss than ever."

Mrs. Dene talked to Zaccheus as if he were both deaf and blind. He had only recently come out of what she called "his fit o' sittin' ovver fire and talkin' rubbish to hissen."

"I knaw what ya's talkin' on," said Webb, drinking his coffee and eating his bread and bacon.

"Oh, you do, do you; well, I'm glad to hear

yo say so; it argues you're comin' round. I was agoin' to tell yo about case at 'Sizes."

"'Sizes?"

"Doan't yo' remember me a-tellin' yo' all about row at Norfolk. Doan't yo remember prison visitor tellin' yo?"

"Missie Hoape?"

"Oh, yo remember her, do yo?"

"Mildred Hope, she wor fond o' Mira, she wor."

At thought of the two girls as he had seen them together, Zaccheus left the table and sat down by the fire.

"Eh dear, there ye go agen," said Charity Dene, "yo'n say no more for a week. I'm gettin' kinder tired o' this. Here, tek your pipe, yo're an owd mawkin; just as yo was comin' round, an all!"

The woman filled his pipe and gave it to him. He looked up at her in a dumb, distressed way, remarking, "I knaw all about it; doan't yo bother; she'll come hum, Mira will, she'll come hum."

"I dessay she may, and I dessay she mayn't," said Charity, lighting his pipe, at which he began to pull.

"Mek no doubt on it, all i' good time," he said.

"Lord, Lord, what a fuss about a bit of a wench; why, when I was a gel it was a common thing for a lass to run off, aye, and to somethin' even wuss than what Mira's got. Wuss! Why I heard say i' Yarmouth oanly yisterday as she'd left Squire Barkstead for a dooke, and was a-drivin' i' her carridge wi' don't knaw how many servants, the like of which was fit for a queen. Well, she had a way wi' her had our Mira, it was that imperuous at times as yo'd a thought she was brought up on a nigger plantation wi' a whip in her hand, but mostly good tempered, mostly, that's true, and such a merry grig; not no good a tryin' to keep a lass o' that build down here fishin' and muddlin' about, not no kind o' use that. I said so to Squire Barkstead·

And to think o' they two a meetin' as they did! And him a-killin' the other, leastways doin' of him in a feight. But he wor a 'igh tempered un, that David! And proud! I should think so!"

"When wether tuk up I said she'll come, not i' the snaw and slush, but i' the sun wi' a westerly breeze."

"Yes, oh yes," said Charity, scornfully, "and live at hoame and tak' a hand wi' the herrin' curin', shouldn't wonder, and help mek the beds and mess about wi' slops and the like. That's reight, she'll come."

"I dunno what yo' means 'bout 'Sizes."

"Hello, what wakkin' up again; well, I'm sure! Why, he was tried at 'Sizes yesterday, and 'bor Green, as brought groceries from Yarmouth, says they've 'quitted un."

"Killed un, didn't 'e?" Webb asked, looking round with a curious attempt at understanding.

"Killed un, aye, and Crowner said it was with

extended circumstances, meanin' as t'other struck fust blow."

"So I shouldna wonder."

"Well, he was buried and t'other was tried; last time pays for all—tried at 'Sizes—David Keith for manslaughter, and jury said Not Guilty."

"Not Guilty!" Webb repeated, and turned once more to the fire.

"They said at fust, the jury did, as he was justified, but judge he said they mun put it more explicit, so after puttin' yeds together a bit, they said Not Guilty; and 'bor David Keith he be 'quitted doan't 'e see, 'quitted of the whul thing."

"David was mortal fond; but she'll come hum, Mira will."

"Why, bless me, here be Miss Hope; she'll tell you all about it. And surely Master David Keith his very self! Lor', sir, I axes your pardon. Last time you was here you was upset and I was upset, but I hadn't got right hang o'

things—and truth is I liked him better nor you, and I couldn't help it, so there; but I meks my humble 'pology all the same."

"Don't mention it, Mrs. Dene," said David, "I was anxious at the first opportunity to see my old friend."

"Here be Master David Keith," said Charity, plucking Webb by the sleeve.

Webb turned his head and tried to fix his blinking eyes on David, who drew a chair near the old man and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Don't you know me, Zacky, dear old friend?"

"Knaw yo'? Yas, I knaws yo'. She'll come, doan't yo' mek no doubt. Knaw yo'! Oh, my God!"

The old man rose to his feet, held his hand upon his heart, and began to pace the room. Then seeing Mildred he paused to look at her.

"An' yo' browt her hum?" he asked.

"Not yet," said Mildred, "we must pray for her, and have patience."

"That's so; patience; have patience; I can wait, I can wait; winter'll pass all i' good time."

Then he sat down again. David took his hand. The old man smiled in a helpless kind of way.

"You have let your pipe out," said David; "let me light it for you."

David took the pipe and lighted it. Zaccheus put it to his lips.

"It be true," he said, in a whisper, "yo' be Master David Keith?"

"Quite true, old friend."

"Charity 'muses me wi' fables; but I knaws yo' well enough, if yo' say I baint dreamin'."

"Dreaming, Zaccheus, not a bit of it," David replied, "haven't we had many a voyage on the Scud? Haven't I rowed the dingey many a time to meet you off Gorleston?"

"Surely, surely," said Zaccheus, laying his pipe aside and withdrawing his hand from David to rub his palms together, remarking with a

chuckle, "and Charity says I be stark, starin' mad."

"She is only joking," said David.

"I knaw, I knaw; she thinks I doan't knaw as Mira have gone; she thinks I doan't knaw the world's agoin' all wrong, and the fish is a' caught: doan't tell me, I knaws all about it."

He rubbed his wrinkled hands together, smiling knowingly, but with such a sad look in his eyes that the tears came into David's, and he turned to ask Mildred to speak to the poor old fellow.

But Charity Dene had beckoned Mildred to the window seat. Having answered Mildred's many questions about the old man, she, herself, became the interrogator. "Yes, it was quite true," Mildred said, "that the first finding of the jury was considered to be informal, although it meant that David had acted in self-defence, that his action was justifiable. The judge had

instructed them that this being their opinion—and the foreman said it was their unanimous opinion—their formal verdict should be Not Guilty. There was great applause in Court at this; and then the jury consulted together, and the foreman stood forward, and, in answer to the Clerk of Arraigns, he said they found the prisoner 'Not Guilty.' There was more applause in Court at that, and David turned towards his father with a great sigh of relief, and the next moment father and son embraced each other, and people shed tears as the old man laid his head upon David's shoulder, overcome with emotion."

"Eh, dear, eh, dear, just to think of it," said Charity Dene, "and I've knawed a man to be hanged for poachin'."

"We are all deeply thankful to God for David's escape, and shall never cease to deplore the death of his assailant. You have much to regret also, Charity Dene."

"I knaw, I knaw," said Charity, "and I shall, of course, never hear the last of that—Mester Justice Barkstead towd me I ought to be whipped, and I don't forget first words as you said to me when yo know'd as I left them in the house together; but what was I to do? He was so oncommon pleasant, and so rich, and paid me so well. And what's more, I thought it wor best thing for Miss Webb."

"Oh, Charity, you could not have thought that!" said Mildred, quickly.

"But I did; it mought hev been my blessed ignorance, but I did."

"You don't think so now?"

"No, I got over that I'll allow, and I see that never no good can come of a bad action. Don't be angry wi' me, Miss Hope, I hev done my best since then, and will to the end; and though I did like young Squire Barkstead as was killed better nor t'other, I will say I'm glad Mester

David Keith is better than I expected he mought hev been, and I'm mortal glad they didn't conclude to hang him."

Charity, while penitent to some extent in regard to her share in the tragedy, could not feel sufficiently kind to let Mildred off without these passing reflections.

"David Keith's first wish on being unanimously acquitted by a jury of his fellow-countrymen, and with the approval of the judge," said Mildred, "was to see Elmira's father; and this is his first outing during his convalescence, for you know that he was dangerously wounded, do you not, in that unhappy meeting?"

"Yes, I knaw'd that, and I was main sorry," said Charity.

"And furthermore, he wished to drive over to the Look-out, to see some other old friends of his and Mr. Webb's; and when we say good-bye to you, David will go and tell the Look-out

men that he is going to present them with a new boat to be called the Zaccheus Webb."

"Which I'm sure they need one, and they'll be proud to have it ca'd after our mester; they oft'n comes the men do to ask after him, and some on um tries to hev a crack wi' him, but they finds it 'ard to mek anything out of un, and he do look at 'em sometimes that queer as you doesn't know whether to laugh or cry."

"Who is managing his business?"

"Oh, as for that, there baint much management to it, that owd hunx William does his best, and Look-out cap'n he gives a sort of hand to it, and Mr. Petherick be atakin' interest in things."

"Then you may be sure the best will be done that can be done in that direction," said Mildred.

"I tek that for granted, and I hope you'll excuse me for sayin' you looks hearty, miss, I hope as prisoners and other poor folks is doing putty well."

"Thank you," said Mildred, "I wish I could do more for them," moving towards the fire, as David rose to take leave of Zaccheus.

"I must say good-bye, now," said David, laying his hand upon the old man's arm.

"David Keith," muttered Zaccheus, "made for a sailor, mortal fond o' Mira."

"Good-bye old friend."

Zaccheus held David's hand.

"It was while the "Scud" was laid up i' Boston," he said.

"Yes," David replied, "try and think when we used to sit in the garden and talk of ships at sea and first signs of the herring."

"I meant it to a ben a fine weddin', when David come back—David Keith, young lawyer chap as aimed to be fisherman; but there yo' nivver knaw how weather's goin' to be wi' glass shiftin' up and down like a skip-jack."

"It will be settled weather soon," said David,

"then I'll come back, and Mildred will come, and we will put to sea in a three-master and sail right into the sunshine."

"I dunno what be a-talkin' of, but I likes to hear yo'—doan't leave me."

The old man turned his wrinkled and pitiful face up to David who still held his trembling hand.

"It's a long time waitin'," the old man remarked, his mind going off again to thoughts of Mira. "I'n waited and waited; but she'll come, I mek no doubt, if I can only live through the storm; it's a hard un to weather; but we mun nevver despair."

"That's right," said David. "Good-bye for the present."

Zaccheus lapsed into silence, his gaze fixed upon the fire, his hands lying idly upon his knee, his worn face showing no further signs of intelligence or life.

Mildred knelt down by his side and thought a prayer for him, and as she rose she kissed the helpless hands and said, "Good-bye, poor dear broken-hearted father! Good-bye."

"That's wust on it," said Charity, smoothing her apron; "he goes off into them fits o' unconsciousness, or whatsumever they mays be, and it ul tek me hours to rouse him."

"I am sure you are good to him," said Mildred; "let me ask you to accept this little gift, and I want you to write a letter to an address I shall send you, the postage will be costly but I will give you money."

"Yes, miss, who be I to get to write him?"

"I forgot that you cannot write, Charity; I will ask one of Mr. Petherick's clerks to wait upon you and you can tell him what you wish to say."

"Thank you kindly," said the woman, making a curtsy.

"Good-bye, then," said Mildred.

Dividing his attention between the silent figure by the fire and Mildred's leave-taking, David watched the prison visitor with a newborn admiration of her gentle ways and her soft sweet voice.

"A blind woman might see which way the cat's a' jumpin'," said Charity to herself as she watched Mildred and David plodding over the sandhills to the Look-out station, "it's a wonderful thing how events do come about; she was always fond on him, that religious lass wi' her soft ways and her insinoatin' voice, and as I says religion aint no bar to love, not a bit, though men's shy on it; not as religion ever seemed to hurt Mildred Hope so far as bein' happy and the like and even passin' over a joke good natur'd, I never see a neater ankle, nor a nattier foot; I've heard Mira say the same, and I think it made Mira go to that high and mighty bootmaker as got his

wares, they says, from France, not as Mildred needed such 'elps to nattiness; and as for her figure, well I often said the young man as gets Mildred woan't need to repine, staid as they say she is, for she's blessed wi' everythin', I should say, as a young man might desire. I dessay that Mester Keith may be Mester Right to her but he's a way wi' him as I never liked so well as Squire Barkstead: but then he had never the money; the way as Squire chucked his guineas about, well, it was enough to turn a lass's head, it turned mine I knaw, and I'se sorry for it; but what's the good a sayin' 'lead us not into temptation,' when a fine spoken young feller like him comes about wi' his guineas and his dimin's and his jewels and his nice manners and asingin' songs like a male angel, as I says to Mira many's the time. Well, we nevver knows what's agoin' to come to pass—but if them two aint made up their minds about a weddin' ring and

all the rest, Charity Dene's no judge and you can just count her out as no good. Hello, dear, dear, why you'll burn your boots, come out o' that!"

The old man had slipped towards the fire until his boots rested on the bars. His face was curiously drawn and his eyes were full of tears.

"Come, come, mester, what's the matter, get up, man, get up."

She took him by the arm, pushed his chair from the fire and he began to sob.

"That's reight, now you'll be better; I was afeered it was somethin' wuss, that a was. I once seed my father in a fit and it began just like that. But there, it's only come from feelin' a bit upset thinkin' o' things. Come, mester, let me gie yo' a drop o' drink that'll put you reight."

She went to the cupboard and brought out a tumbler into which she poured a fair modicum of brandy and pressed it to his lips.

"That's reight," she said, as the old man opened his lips and began to drink. "That's reight, we all 'as our feelin's, and yo'n been hard put to it, that's a fact."

"Thank," said the old man, "thank," and, stretching his stiffened limbs, he rose to his feet and walked to the window.

"Want to see 'em? They'se gone to the Look-out; be goin' to gie 'em a boat and call it after yo'—Zaccheus Webb."

"That's so," he said, leaning against the window-frame, his wet eyes wandering over the grey sea.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL ON A SUMMER'S DAY.

WHEN the summer came again Zaccheus Webb's bed was drawn up to the window that he might see the garden and look out upon the ocean.

He only spoke now in whispers. Except for the hair upon them, denoting a strength that had gone, his hands were white and so thin that you could count the bones in them. His face had lost most of its curious puckered wrinkles. A straggling beard partly concealed his mouth and chin. His eyes were sunken. There was a restfulness in their expression and in the quiet

mouth that betokened the approach of a painless death. He was like a ship outward bound that waited for a favouring wind.

Beneath the window was the rustic seat where Harry Barkstead had waited for David and Elmira on that day when David had told the girl of his projected trip to Newfoundland, and had walked home afterwards too triumphantly for Harry's jealous and crooked nature. The dusky beauty with her golden crown and her weatherbeaten face still dominated the old seat. The nasturtiums were climbing over her faded gown. The box-edged flower beds had been somewhat neglected, but they put forth radiant tributes to the sun nevertheless—peonies, clovepink, rosemary, pansies, sweet pea; the lilac and laburnum were shedding their flowers upon the gravelled walk in a fading splendour of perfume and colour. Over the cottage porch a thousand rose-buds were bursting into bloom; and down even to the

margin of the sea the dunes were decorated with waving grasses and humble flowers that trailed along the sands as if nature were designing a carpet for fairy footfalls.

On one of the stillest days of this sweet summer time a steam yacht, one of the first handsome vessels of the kind, built for pleasure and fitted with a luxury of furniture and convenience hitherto unknown in sea-going craft, appeared off Caister and cast anchor.

Zaccheus saw it. Charity Dene saw it. The sun seemed to give it a friendly recognition, flashing on its brass stanchions and whitening its smoking funnel.

Presently a boat was lowered. Two sailors dropped into it. A woman descended by a short rope-ladder. She waved her hand to a gentleman in a yachting jacket as she took her seat in the stern, and the two sailors pulled for the shore.

The old man watched the boat, and Charity Dene watched Zaccheus.

"Yo' an got eyes of late that look straight into future," said the woman in a low voice; "what do yo' make on it?"

"Mira!" said the old man, "Mira!"

"Pray God it be!" said Charity, now more gentle in her manner towards the old man than when we saw her last. The prospect of death had softened her, and she was sorry for the broken-hearted old fisherman.

"I hev prayed," said Zaccheus, lifting his head with difficulty, so as not to lose sight of the boat.

"Yo' be the most patient man I hev ivver knawd, Mester Webb," said Charity, raising his head and propping him up with an extra pillow.

"I knawd she'd come," he replied, and there could be no mistaking the lithe, active woman who—the boat being driven right upon the beach—leaped ashore and made straight for the old cottage.

Charity did not seem to have the power to

leave the room. There was nobody below stairs; they heard their visitor swing open the garden gate, heard her enter the cottage, heard her call in an impatient, anxious way, "Charity, where are you? Father!"

The old man looked at Charity, who responded with an anxious glance towards the door. All was quiet again. The visitor had evidently gone into the back part of the cottage. Then the door at the foot of the stairway was unlatched, and a footstep was heard approaching—a quiet footstep, as if the visitor had suddenly learnt that there was sickness in the house.

The door opened. A lovely woman, with a pale tearful face, stood in the doorway for a moment, and then, with a smothered cry, flung herself upon her knees by the bed.

"Mira!" said Zaccheus, stretching out a long, thin arm towards her. "Mira!"

She buried her face in the bedside, and with

one hand felt for his across the clothes. Their hands found each other. Zaccheus tried to draw his child towards him, but he was very feeble.

"Do 'e get up," said Charity, taking Elmira gently by the arm.

"Oh, my God!" said the woman, choking with her tears, "I have killed him!"

"Mira," said the old man, "I knawd yo'd come; Mira kiss me."

She pressed a burning kiss upon his mouth and stroked his thin hair, and sobbed and cried until Charity Dene could do nothing but sit down and smother her own tears in her apron.

But there were no tears in the eyes of Zaccheus. On the contrary, he smiled and looked happy.

"Oh, father, father, I have nothing to say, only I love you, yes, dear, I do. I was mad, vain, I——"

"My dear love," whispered the old man.

"Mira, I knaw'd yo'd never let me go, and not say good-bye."

"Father, I have one thing to say," she went on, between her sobs, "I am a married woman now, and have a son, and he will some day be an earl and——"

Zaccheus did not care whether she was married or not. He heard none of the cheap explanation with which the poor vain foolish woman hoped to soothe his last hours. He was not at any time sufficiently trained in the ways of the world to appreciate the honour which an aristocrat had conferred on the mistress of another; nor to understand the distinction of being the grandfather of a dishonoured son. He only knew that his child had come back to him. He only remembered her as the bright angel of his widowerhood, his pretty loving girl who sang "Cupid's Garden," and could handle on oar with the best beachman of Yarmouth. He did not see the

jewel on her finger, nor note the texture of her yachting gown. He felt her hand in his, heard her voice, she had kissed him; he remembered nothing of her but what was sweet; and all he had to say was, "Mira, love, I knaw'd yo'd come."

The sun shone brightly on sea and garden as he slept. It burnt in at the window so lavish of its beams that Charity drew down the blind. They both sat long by the bed and watched, and Elmira remembered snatches of prayers that Mildred Hope had taught her; but he did not wake again. The patient soul of the Caister smacksman had put to sea. It was enough for Zaccheus that her hand was in his when he was signalled to lift anchor for his latest voyage.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BURIED TREASURE.

THE same sweet summer's day that saw Zaccheus Webb weigh anchor for his last voyage saw Alan Keith and David his son sail into the still waters of Wilderness Creek.

It was on just such a day that Alan had first discovered the secret harbour.

Here it was once more with its reflections of Demon's Rock, its sandy shores, its distant range of sheltering hills, and its weird and happy memories.

When David dropped the anchor of the smack "Nautilus", which his father had bought at St. John's,

the old man after contemplating the scene for some minutes could only remark, "It's very hot, David, for Labrador." It was not a romantic observation. But as the leading incidents of Alan's life passed before him almost like a flash with this remarkable denouement—this return to Nasquappe and the harbour and the rendezvous of his band of patriots and freebooters—his mind seemed to find relief in the most prosaic observations.

"Is it?" was David's none the less commonplace reply.

"Maist as hot as Spain," said Alan, "and the silence o' the place reminds me o' Venice when I made excursions on the lagoons i' the neight time."

"It is very quiet," said David, "and very beautiful."

"I propose we just tek a drink, David," said the old man, "as for mysel I'll temporise the watter wi' a nip o' whasky."

As he spoke Alan drew half a tumbler of water from a keg, sheltered from the sun in the stern of the boat. He filled up the vessel with whisky from a stone jar which was part of certain necessaries of food and drink stored close by.

"Here's to ye!" said Alan wiping his lips, and passing the jar to David.

"Water for me, father," said David. "Ill try your dew of the mountain later, when we smoke."

"As ye will," said Alan, restoring the jar to the hamper, and the horn tumbler with it. "Ye did nae thenk there was aught as fine as this i' these latitudes, eh?"

"As fine," said David, "but not as beautiful; why it might be one of the holiday lakes one hears about in your native Scotland."

"Eh, man, ye're reight there, it's the sairt o' country that gets into your brain, and I tell ye' my son, the story o' this harbour is to me something like a fable o' long and long ago,

and yet at the minute when we run in here as if we'd oiled our keel it was like yesterday, wi' all its strange and true happenings thick in my memory."

"Don't you think we might moor the smack to yonder piles?" said David.

"The thing I was gaen to sae mysel', David, if they'll houd. I remember John Preedie and Donald Nicol driving them, nigh on thirty years back," said Alan.

"They look strong enough for a ship, let alone a smack," said David, hauling up the anchor which he had previously dropped; "will you take an oar, father?"

Alan thrust a long oar into its rowlock, David taking up another and trying to use it as a pole to shove the boat and steer her at the same time.

Alan laughed, a rare habit with him; David hardly remembered when he had heard him laugh,

though his smile was pleasant to see, and frequent.

"Ye meight as weel try to sound the Atlantic wi' a marline-spike; man, it's a' but fathomless i' the middle; gradual as the shores shelve downwards they come to the same kind o' precipice as the tableland above the rock yonder, and then it's watter below just as it's sky above; pull, noo, starboard; that's it, laddie; noo sling your rope; that's got her!"

"Hold?" said David, straining on the rope, "why the timber is as solid as the rock."

The smack lay as still as she had lain before, her keel breaking into the reflections of the noble face of Demon's Rock.

"Ye see the cairns yonder amang the foot hills o' the rock?" Alan asked, pointing across the sandy shore to the mountain.

"Yes," David replied, pulling on his rough jacket.

"The sand and the wind and the bit growth o' sea-thistles and the like hae been vera usefu'—

whae'd think o' questioning the sinceerity o' tombstones on which Time has written such epitaphs!"

"They look grim and serious," said David.

"Laddie, they are grim and serious maist o' them—all except the three i' the middle—I ca' them the three graces—and the one to the north o' the row."

"How do you know one from the other—the real graves, and the treasure casks?"

"How did I ken the channel that brought us here?" was Alan's reply.

David had asked his question in a non-committal inquiring spirit, more by way of saying something than with a view to question his father. He had it in his mind to prepare himself and his father for the breaking up of a wild illusion, the bursting of a bubble, the awakening from a dream; for he had never altogether even in his most sanguine moments accepted his father's

account of the buried treasure as anything more than an unconscious exaggeration of some more or less trivial secreting of hard-won savings, if not the baseless fancy of a mind distraught.

"David, I hae dreamed mysel' shoutin' and dancin' if ever I lived to resurrect the three graces: I hae thought o' mysel' as goin' just wild when the time should come that I stood here again, and it's only o' late as ye ken that I began to think o' ye by my side, my son, Hannah's child. What wad hae been the use o' the goud and things, wi'out ye, David? And yet I used to dream about bein' here and gloatin' ower it; but that mun a been prophetic in a way, for it was surely ordained that I should find ye at last as I did. Eh man, what a meetin' it was! David, we'll be grateful to God for it; we'll consider oursels His stewards."

David felt his doubts increase as his father

went rambling on, never attempting to advance towards the pathetic looking cemetery with its stones packed up originally into the shape of crosses, now crooked, fallen into odd forms, with grey bits of weed and lichen on them, and drifts of sand held together by marum or other wiry grasses, such as repeated, here and there, weedy growths that reminded David of the dunes at Caister.

"I couldna hae believed that I should stand here sae calm and businesslike, as if the cairns o' Wilderness Creek, and the mighty rock above them, to say naething about the cavern beyond, were the maist common-place things i' Nature. D'ye see the cavern, David? Ye'll imagine it's the entrance to a Cathedral, man, when ye hae passed the foothills and the cairns, sae grand is it; and it's away up above that I hae stored the other bit o' money and scrip I telt ye of, wi' the wee bit huts and the rest."

David's imagination was touched with the lonely beauty of the scene, the strangeness of their visit, the rock towards which his father waved his long bony hand, a vast solid mighty stone, as it seemed with ridges cut into it and sharp ledges, and with a tall smooth crown contrasting in a striking way with the jagged peaks and points of the army of sentinels that took their orders, as it were, from the chief and went ranging along the coast for miles and miles, looking out to sea and at the same time peering up into the heavens.

"Shove oot the gangway, David, my son," said Alan, presently, "we might as weel gae ashore to our work i' comfort and i' order."

David made a gangway of one of the several planks that lay amidships with shovels, pickaxes, and other implements, carefully stored out of sight under a heavy tarpaulin.

"Noo, lad, the tools."

While David swung a couple of shovels over his shoulder, his father drew forth a blacksmith's hammer and an axe very much like the formidable weapon that Damian, the dwarf, had wielded with deadly effect upon the "Anne of Dartmouth."

David was the first to step ashore. His were the only footprints to be seen, of either man, bird or animal. Millions of insects seemed to start up and carry the news of the strange arrival from tiny hillock to tiny valley.

Shouldering his axe and carrying the great hammer in his hand Alan Keith followed his son. Their tall shadows climbed ahead as if to pioneer them to the little cemetery.

"Noo, lad, we'll need the trunk," said Alan, dropping his hammer and his axe.

David returned for a leather packing case that had handles fore and aft.

Father and son carried it between them.

A flight of birds rushed screaming from the cavern beneath Demon's Rock as they approached it. Alan started and David uttered an exclamation of surprise. The birds disappeared among the foothills.

"When it's dark and stormy," said Alan, proceeding on his way, "that's the sort o' sma' animal the sailors mistake for demons, and fiends, and the like."

"I don't wonder at the superstition," said David, "the sea must set in upon this coast with awful force in winter."

"It's just wonderfu' to me that we can stand talkin' here and Fortune wi' both her hands full waitin' our pleasure," said Alan, contemplating the cairns.

"Yes, it is," David replied, half reluctant to begin, with the idea of some great disillusion awaiting his father.

"Noo, lad, lay to," said Alan, beginning to

shovel the sand away from the base of the pile of stones that covered the centre grave, "tek the boulders off the top."

David inserted his pick into the interstices of the stones and presently with a shovel began to clear away the sand and weed beneath.

His heart was beating with a hopeful anticipation that all his father had led him to count upon might come true. As he worked at the unsealing of the alleged horde of gold and silver, of lace and spice, and amber, and precious stones, he thought of the great things Mildred might accomplish by way of fulfilling her ambition of charity and love; what he might see of the great world sailing round it for pleasure; what Petherick would say when he called on him at Yarmouth; what he might be permitted to do to smooth the last days of Zaccheus Webb, little thinking that the old smacksman had already on that very day solved the great mystery of all.

"Man," exclaimed Alan, suddenly breaking in upon David's work and reflections, "what if we hae been forestalled?"

"What do you mean, father?" asked David, coming out of his first real unrestricted sensation of faith in the paternal promise of wealth.

"What if that man Bentz, or some ither trait'-rous villain has been here before us and robbed ye of your inheritance?"

"I thought no one else knew of your store," said David, with a sickening doubt of the whole business, "you said they were all lost at sea when you were overborne by the weight and numbers of your enemy."

"All but one," said the old man, "all but the greatest villain i' the wide world!"

"Who was he?" David asked, "What was he?"

"Just the maist ootrageous traitor and vile thief your imagination can conceive. But we are

wastin' time, laddie; it's natural to have a stray doubt come into one's mind after sae many years, and when ye hae got your hand on the handle o' the door, so to speak."

"I should say these stones have not been removed since they were first stacked here," said David, "if there was ever anything of value buried beneath them, depend upon it we shall find it."

"If! d'ye say if, David? weel! weel! I dinna wonder ye should doubt if I can doubt mysel'—stand by and gie me shovel and pick; I'll need the axe later on; nae doubt there's roots o' trees mixed up wi' my ain particular bank up yonder."

David stood aside wiping his hot face and preparing himself generally for the disappointment he had all along feared. His father went to work with a vigour that was remarkable for his years. He bent his back over the excavation, and flung out the sand in a continuous shower,

sand and pebbles, sand and bits of straw, and sprigs of trees that had been packed with the sand to bind it.

"Laddie, I believe ye're reight; nae sacreligious hands hae been pottering about the cemetery o' Wilderness Creek sin' the "St. Dennis" sailed out o' the harbour never to return," said Alan, pausing in his work to catch his breath and cheer his despondent son and comrade.

"I'm glad you think so, father," David answered.

"Gie me the pick, lad," said Alan, laying down his shovel and turning up his sleeves.

Alan took the implement, and swinging it above his head, brought it down upon the spot which he and David had partially cleared. The pick fell with a dull thud upon something that was neither sand nor rock.

"Stand by," he said, his eyes brightening, "stand by, David. It's a' reight, I'm thinking."

David took a step nearer to the old man, who

once more brought his pick down upon the place he had struck before.

"It's there!" he exclaimed, as he drew the pick forth with a tug, "it's there! The shovel, laddie, the shovel!"

"Let me help you now," said David, handing his father the shovel.

Alan took no heed of the remark, but set to work again with unsubdued energy, only to pause when he was assured that at least the cask he had dug for was beneath his feet.

"It's the fresh air and the happiness ye hae brought me that's made me young again," he said, as if answering the point of David's admiration of his father's strength. "My lad, I amna so auld that my sinews are unstrung, my muscles dried up; why, just noo, I feel as if I were ainly beginning life, and I tell ye I dinna mean to dee for many and many a year to come!"

"Let me help you," said David once more,

wondering at the same time how even his strange and eccentric father could pause to boast in the midst of work that was to end with a vast prize or a terrible blank, and either within touch.

"Shovel the stuff away frae the side o' the hole," Alan said, as he took up the pick once more, "and gie me elbow room."

David made the mouth of the excavation free from sand and stones, and Alan drove the pick once more into the obstruction that had gripped it. The result was a portion of the end of a cask. Another attack brought up a second piece, rotten and soft. Alan laid the two pieces of wood within arm's length of the hole, and then, lying prone by its side, thrust his right hand into it.

"The Frenchman's silver flagon, sure as fate!" he exclaimed, placing upon the bank a beautifully-shaped jug, its gold arabesque shining out through the tarnish of the silver.

David could not speak. He stood with parted lips, watching the unearthing of the treasure.

"Man, I ken them a'! I remember Preedie cramming the last lot o' the bright and jewelled trinkets and what not into the top o' the cask. I've gotten houd o' the dagger the Frenchman said he'd looted wi' a heap o' preecious things frae a palace i' the East; nay, I dinna ken where. Here it is, and by the might o' bonnie Scotland, there's the same grand light blazing on the hilt that I remember as weel as if it were yesterday."

David stooped to take the dagger, and before he had looked at it out came a metal box, with the remark of the excavator, "Solid silver"; followed by a chafing dish, and the remark, "Solid silver wi' goud ornaments"; then a wooden box with seals upon it, with the remark, "Amber"; to be succeeded by other packages and curios, handed out with similar running remarks, "A jewelled snuff-box, atta of

roses, a little idol made o' a great pearl, wi' diamonds for eyes and a sapphire headpiece. Man! I remember them as if it was yesterday the Frenchman bragged o' them as he got fuddled wi' his red wine, which me and my crew could drink like water and never wink."

David shook himself to be sure that he was David; that he was not in bed at Yarmouth; and then he felt inclined to shout, "Father, forgive me, I thought you were mad."

"What d'ye think about it now?" Alan asked, looking up, his eyes ablaze, his face streaming with perspiration, his mouth wreathed in smiles.

"I cannot think," said David, "I want to dance."

"Then dance, lad! and I'll set ye the tune," he said; "here it is," and he handed David a small bag. "Press it to your heart, David, and dance like your great namesake who danced before the Lord; for ye hae got a treasure now

that Mildred can build her hospital wi', and set a' her needy puir i' business from Caister to Gorleston; and ye can build the church we promised Father Lavello, i' the midst o' Heart's Content; and puir auld Alan Keith can raise a monument i' the forest to God's angel upon earth."

As he said these words he rose to his feet and David seized him by the hand.

"Father," he exclaimed, "I never thought it was quite true; not that I doubted your word, but it passed beyond all my hopes, and now I don't know how to contain myself."

"I'll sit me doon," said Alan, "not here—I'll gae aboard; I'm feelin' a trifle tired, and a wee bit thoughtfu'. Eh, man, I only wish the comrades who stood here i' the past, and who helped store these things were here to tek their share and divide wi' me. Nay, nay, on second thoughts I dinna wish anything o' the kind, except, perhaps, i' the case o' Preedie and Donald Nicol—the

ithers wad just a' misapplied it. David, I dinna ken quite what I'm sayin'; I'll gae aboard and hae another wee drap to steady mysel'."

"But this bag, father," said David, still holding the small leather bag that his father had placed in his hands with so many exclamations as to its value. It was a soft, thick bag, drawn together with thongs of leather; it had once been sealed, but the wax was broken, and the thongs had been clumsily re-tied.

"Preedie understood a' about precious stones and the like, I couldna tell them frae glass for my pairt, but Preedie just loved to sit doon and finger these i' the bag, finger them and gloat ower them, and he said they were worth a king's ransom; pearls, diamonds, sapphires and rubies, one o' the biggest diamonds to be re-cut, he said, and he talked o' Amsterdam, and dealers i' stones, and cutters and the like, that wise I often wondered if he'd been i' the trade. Open the bag, David."

David undid the thongs and emptied a few of the stones into the palm of his hand.

"Not changed one bit," said Alan, "the same wonderfu' sky blue, the same blude red, the same glassy white wi' ten thousand sparks in 'em—weel, David, what d'ye mek on 'em?"

"I should say they are all Mr. Preedie thought them; they are wonderful."

"A king's ransom he said they were worth. But gin there be ony mistake why there's a barrel o' English guineas and braw new shellins, and Spanish coins, that'll mek amends."

Alan went on board the smack. David watched him until he disappeared below. It was a small cabin, but there were two bunks in it, and the old man had evidently decided to lie down. David now began to think that Wilderness Creek might not be quite the secret place his father imagined. He suddenly felt the responsibility of wealth, and looked about him to be sure that he

was not under the surveillance of some desperado. He thought of the description of the coast which the captain of the "Morning Star" had given him, and felt if his pistols were safe in his belt. Then he laid his jacket over the treasures that were lying on the ground, and putting the bag of precious stones beneath it, shovelled more of the sand from the mouth of the buried cask and cautiously dropped into it, stooping down and proceeding with the work of emptying it. He hauled out all kinds of packages, cups, ornaments, chalices, bundles of lace, flasks bound in woven reeds and sealed with seals, and at last concluded that it would be wise to fill the leather trunk which his father had brought to carry the treasures on board.

After awhile, looking towards the smack, he saw his father sitting calmly amidships smoking his chibouk. He waved his hand to the old man who responded by raising his pipe and saluting

with it as if it were a sword. Then David began to pack the trunk. He laid the dagger and all the boxes that were flat at the bottom, the quaint packages of laces, the well wrapped amber, the cups and chalices, the curious ornaments, a pair of jewelled belts heavy with gold and thick with rose diamonds that did not sparkle much but had a very grand and regal appearance. In a corner between soft packages and reed-wrapped flasks of perfumes and strange spices, he placed the bag of stones. To keep the whole fairly firm he filled the remainder of the trunk with sand and dry weed and debris of Old Time, of storm and stress and heat and cold, and proceeded to drag the treasure to the smack.

"When ye hae got your treasure," said Alan at night, as they sat in the little cabin after supper, "then comes the anxiety of guarding it. Considerin' that there is some kind o' law about treasure trove we hae got to be carefu' and

discreet. It is true Preedie bought most o' the land hereabouts; it is true he has endowed ye with the same; I am not quite sure that his precautions bar what are ca'd the reights o' the crown; not that I hae asked our friend Lawyer Margrave or anyone whether such rights hae ony weight here i' Labrador; but ye will see the wisdom o' the wee bit furnace in which we can melt down such coins and such silver as we may deem best to keep in ingots, so to speak."

"I don't question your judgment in anything," said David, "and I think you are as wonderful as you are good; to have maintained your sanity and your purpose through such sufferings and sorrows as have fallen to your lot is miraculous."

"Aye, 'tis in a way, David; but I began wi' an enormous constitution; my father and grandfather and every Keith I ever heard on, were a' mighty folk, soldiers and sailors, fighting men, wi' tough sinews and big bones——"

"And big hearts," said David.

"Ye may say that," Alan replied, "and yet I left my ain father promising to go hame, and I didna gae hame, and he deed, and was buried wi'out a hand o' mine to help lay him to rest; he'd hae forgiven me if he had seen your mother, David; but there, we munna waste time talkin' o' the past sae far away. We'll ship a cargo wi' a' convenient speed and tek it to St. John's; there's a cellar i' the house that'll keep the chest safe enough; and we can negotiate some o' the stones and things through your trustee, Mr. Margrave, who seems to be baith shrewd and reliable. I induced him to remain at St. John's sae lang as I might want him, and I made him tek a fee that was not out o' proportion wi' any reasonable service I might require."

"It is a pity we cannot trust any one to help us," said David. "I am fearful of leaving the place."

"Ye needna be," Alan replied; "depend upon it i' a' these years Wilderness Creek is just the lonely unvisited spot I found it when I was an adventurous young fellow, and i' love wi' your dear mother, who wad aften say she fear'd I didna quite ken hoo dreadfu' the coast was hereabouts."

"You think it is best to sail home with this first portion of our cargo?"

"That's my opinion," said Alan; "dinna put a' your eggs i' one basket is a gude proverb; I had to disregard it when I was clearin' to defend the rebel flag as they ca'd it, though it's a grand flag enough noo in general estimation. Besides, laddie, we named a day to return, and dinna ye think Mildred will be anxious aboot ye?"

"Of course, of course," said David, whose thoughts were not wandering away from Mildred, while they were bent upon the treasures that

were to be so great a boon to her as well as to himself.

"My idea is just to tek this first cargo clean hame, the contents o' the one cask, and to mek two other trips, perhaps three; I hae thought it a' oot, David, mair than ye hae, laddie, for the reason that ye hae nae quite realised what we hae been aboot until ye stood face to face wi' the reality o' the romance I hae been telling ye a' this time. Dinna fash yoursel' lad, we'll land the treasure and convert it, nivver fear."

"I hope so," said David.

"I am sure so," was Alan's quick reply. "Tomorrow we'll land our furnace and set it up; it's sma', but it'll do a' we require, and ye shall blow the bellows, David, to the finest music ye hae heard for many a year; and wi' all due reverence we'll just worship at the altar that all the world worships at, but we'll melt our golden images to build hospitals wi' and mek folks

happy—oursels amang the rest, David, we are nae gaeing to forget oursels."

Night came down dark and silent, with here and there a star; and, notwithstanding his anxieties, David slept so soundly that the sun had risen and his father was up and preparing breakfast before he awoke.

"Another glorious day," said Alan, as David rubbed his eyes and sat up in his bunk, "and yesterday is true! We are unearthing the treasure! Ye hae come into your fortune. Noo, lad, up ye get and tek a swim i' the waters o' Wilderness Creek, where ye are monarch of all ye survey—and mair, and much mair David, my son—and God bless ye lad!"

CHAPTER XVI.

DAVID'S WIFE.

AFTER frowning upon him and pursuing him with misadventure, even unto the very valley of the shadow of death, Fortune smiled upon David Keith and endowed him with happiness without a drawback beyond the common discounts that belong to the natural state of man. She had not altogether shielded him from the penalties of his hereditary passion of vengeance; but she had brought him through the perils thereof with a far less and much briefer punishment than that which had fallen to the lot of his father.

Moreover, David's good fortune in this respect

was further secured, and guarantees given to Fate by his marriage with a woman who had the power and the opportunity to influence him in the direction of the most perfect charity.

Mildred Hope also had her reward of a silent and self sacrificing love in the realisation of her most sanguine hopes. She had never dared to pray for such bliss as had been vouchsafed her. The reader knows that her views of prayer were not in the direction of petitions for material blessings. They were rather the register of her own ambition to do good deeds, and to be worthy of heavenly recognition, than supplications for this, and that, and blessings upon her worldly enterprises. Hoping all things, good, desiring power for the sake of others, she had achieved her unspoken ambition, and saw her way to be God's almoner.

It had been a quiet wedding at the church where Mildred as a girl had received her first

impulse of religious faith and active charity. She was a very beaming bride, despite that touch of seriousness in her manner and attire that had appealed to the worldly mind of Mrs. Charity Dene as not incompatible with love. Sally Mumford confessed that she had no idea how pretty Mildred really was until she saw her dressed for the wedding, that made Sally not less happy than the bride herself. David had recovered his strength, and his eye was almost as bright as his father's, his lips continually parting to laugh, or say something expressive of his joy. He had come to love Mildred with a full heart, and to feel in it a sense of rest, and happiness. Alan Keith was at the wedding, erect, clean-shaven, bony and wrinkled as ever, but with the deep-set eyes, long thin hands, prominent nose, and broad wrinkled forehead, that characterised his first appearance in Hartley's Row. Instead of the rough flannel cotton that

usually fell about his throat, tied with a silk scarf of some odd colour, Sally Mumford had induced him to put on a white linen shirt and a light blue stock with a gold pin in it. Nothing would induce him, however, to change his gaberdinish coat and his curious vest, but the buckles in his shoes had been polished, and they were nearly as white as Mildred Hope's teeth, which flashed now and then between her red lips. Sally was dressed in a grey silk gown with a pretty old-fashioned pelisse, and her grey hair was gathered in clusters of curls on each temple. Mr. Petherick gave the bride away, and Mr. Margrave, the trustee under Plympton's will, was one of the witnesses.

Margrave had waited at Halifax until the news of the loss of the "Morning Star" had left him nothing else to do but return home; and now, after the wedding, Mr. Alan Keith had been able to give him such a fee with contingent

promise of another as induced him to accompany the party on the wedding tour. The trip was to St. John's, this time from the London Docks, and by steam. The voyage had been delightful, and they had reached St. John's with the first warm sunbeams of an early summer.

They had been able to rent a furnished house belonging to one of the principal residents, who had been tempted to take a holiday in Europe on the strength of Mr. Margrave's proposals for the house, which the astute London lawyer had made through the agent with whom he had long been in communication in regard to David Plympton's bequests. These testamentary gifts were chiefly in favour of David Keith, the property including certain wild and waste lands along the coast of Labrador and extending for some distance inland above Demon's Rock.

Soon after the party landed, therefore, Mildred found herself mistress of what was considered a

very fine house for St. John's, with her father-in-law Alan Keith, Sally Mumford, and Mr. Margrave as visitors. She proved quite equal in every way to her new duties. Sally never tired of praising her and congratulating David on his clever and pretty wife. The only anxious times the two women experienced were during the weeks when David and Alan were away on their excursions to Wilderness Creek. There was no real cause for anxiety, and their fears were brief; they only belonged to the hours or days when the voyagers did not return very close to the times appointed; but David and Alan could not count upon the moment they might sail through the natural gateway of St. John's with their mysterious cargoes.

Everything had happened favourably for the Labrador treasure collectors. Mr. Margrave proved himself a useful ally in the disposal of the valuables. He made a journey to New York

with bullion and precious stones, and paid a very large sum to David Keith's account through New York into the Bank of England, besides making deposits in David's name, for which he brought back scrip in three of the leading banks of the United States.

The deposit which Alan made in the friendly oasis above Demon's Rock he paid without fear or reservation into the bank at St. John's. Whatever he might feel as to certain of the treasures of Wilderness Creek, at least the hoard he had buried away in a secret corner only known to himself was without taint. It consisted of the fund made over to him by his father-in-law, and in part of his own hard earned savings, when it had been settled that he and Preedie should go to Salem or Boston and buy a ship to fight against the buccaneering Ristack. The bank manager was only too glad to welcome to St. John's the heirs of David Plympton, father and

son, and Alan announced his own and his son's intention of promoting enterprises both commercial and charitable bearing upon the welfare of the colony. The bright-eyed old man even spoke of a railroad from St. John's to the two nearest neighbouring settlements, and made various other wild suggestions that were quite in keeping with his strange foreign appearance. The first contract upon which he entered was preliminary to the erection of the fine memorials which now mark the locality of the last resting places, firstly of Hannah Keith, and secondly of the Newfoundland dog Sampson. The broken column with its guardian angel that marks the grave of the belle of the vanished Heart's Delight and the monolith with its sculptured head of a dog that stands in the shadow of a group of tamaracks and other forest trees, are features of Back-Bay Valley, sacred to memories that already belong to tradition and romance.

The new Heart's Content interested Alan Keith only in a negative way. It did not even suggest the village of Heart's Delight upon the ashes of which it was built. There was no trace of the Great House. The fishflakes were all new. The stakes up against which the well-dressed bodies of Ristack and Ruddock had floated, grim tributes to the rough Justice of a great revenge had disappeared. The houses were mostly of brick and stone. The quay was a firm and solid piece of workmanship. There were gardens, but the harbour of the Great House had been burnt up in the general conflagration and clearing which had been undertaken under the authority of the Great Seal of England. All was changed indeed. The inhabitants had little or no record of the past. The people whom Alan had known were mostly dispersed. Even to this day Heart's Content has little or no record of the village upon the ashes of which it was built. The oldest

inhabitant had his stories of the days of the Fishing Admirals and of the war with America, but he was garrulous, often forgot names and dates and so varied his stories that they had come to be regarded as fables. The grave in Back-Bay Valley, and the legend of the dog let into the tamarack had held their place in such romance as the district provided, and the valley had become a pic-nic ground once in a way during autumn days when the fishing was over, for family parties, and the school, which was the principal institution of the new town. Alan had felt a deep sense of gratitude to Heart's Content on this account, and he gave practical expression to it in establishing the foundation of the schools and church beyond the possibility of future want.

If Heart's Content disappointed Alan by the absence of familiar landmarks, it was nevertheless the kind of fishing village and harbour that he and Plympton had thought of as possible at some

future day. Plympton, as we all know, was far less sanguine than Alan, who was imbued with a pathetic sense of the destiny of the oldest British colony. Ungrateful step-mother as the old country undoubtedly was, Alan, with the keen-sighted provision of a shrewd and enterprising Scotchman, gauged the destiny of a territory that was bound to pass through the darkness in which he found it into the light of commercial prosperity, if not Imperial distinction. Alan's hopes and prophecies have been fulfilled, but the height to which his forecast pointed discloses other heights which have to be climbed in the confirmation of Newfoundland's rights and privileges, and in fulfilment of the duty the mother country still owes to her oldest and nearest colony.

In their operations at Wilderness Creek, David and Alan had concluded that it would be well to concentrate their attention upon the cemetery and leave the upper regions of the territory for

their final labours. Not a soul appeared in the region of Nasquappe to disturb them. A couple of eagles evidently had their home on a distant cliff seawards. They would sail now and then in a wide circle over the harbour and disappear behind the lower ranges of the hills; at night mysterious wings would swish by the treasure owners as they carried their last loads to the smack—bats or owls or both; but no human voice was heard, no human footprint except their own marked the sandy shore of the secret harbour. At sea beyond the shelter of Wilderness Creek and far away from the dreaded rocks and shoals, fishing ships rode at anchor or trailed their nets; otherwise the two men were as much alone and as safe from interruption as the men of the "St. Dennis" had been with their added protection of lookouts and sentinels. The light of the furnace which had during the favourable and lovely summer converted thousands of Spanish and English

dollars and guineas into solid ingots and had obliterated the identity of many an antique vessel, cast a lurid light upon the foothills of the entrance to the cavern, and startled such winged life as had been hitherto unaccustomed to any of the disturbing evidences of man's ingenuity. David and Alan laboured away with steady persistence. They had soon become accustomed to their wealth. David had long ceased to utter exclamations over every new find; but at night on board the smack before turning in, father and son had built all kinds of castles in the air, castles that even their cargoes of treasures were not sufficient to encompass; and now and then David would draw from his father fresh details of his adventures, and the father from David hitherto unrelated incidents of his first voyage and wreck. Narratives of his early days in Venice would crop up in all Alan's stories; they came as his chief relief to the horrors of his slavery

and imprisonment. Then he would go back to Heart's Delight and picture to David the winter nights with his grandfather and his mother and Father Lavello in the family circle. Considering the changes that had taken place in the colony, the settled peace at home, the countries covered in his father's record, his own boyhood, and the very remote times that Sally Mumford had spoken of, the similes connected with the Wandering Jew which Alan used now and then seemed quite appropriate, and David found himself searching his memory for other parallels of his father's strange and long career. Alan told his son that when he should reach his age he would find that looking back over half a century was no more than the yesterday of youthful retrospection. What made the time appear a little longer than it dit to persons who remained in one spot all their lives, were the many landmarks of varied events in different places; but even these

at the last came very close together, and life, after all, was just no more and no less than Job described it, "We are but of yesterday and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow."

CHAPTER XVII.

A HAPPY FAMILY.

WHEN the "Nautilus" had made her last voyage, and Alan and David had shovelled back the sand and re-erected the stones above the emptied treasure casks, Alan proposed that they should charter a vessel of more importance and fitted for comfort to make a pleasant coasting trip to Wilderness Creek, carrying sailors and carpenters and certain passengers, with a view to a few weeks' sojourn at the Berry Garden, as he called the green spot above Demon's Rock.

David fell in with the idea, and in the waning days of summer they set about carrying it out.

First, the treasure had to be secured and, as far as possible, invested. This was done with the aid of Mr. Margrave, and such remainders as the Keiths desired to keep intact were packed, some into strong boxes and deposited in the bank, other stores being built into the cellars of the house they had rented, and which, during their absence, were placed in charge of the police, now properly organised and a responsible body, altogether different from the unofficial constabulary that did volunteer service when Alan Keith first knew the capital of the colony. David Plympton, besides his territorial rights at Heart's Content, had left valuable properties, both at Halifax and St. John's, and when Alan and his party sailed on their cruise for Labrador it was made known in a general way that they were going to survey the lands that Plympton had purchased shortly before his death. Mysterious hints were thrown out that valuable minerals

had been discovered there, accounting for Plympton's investment, which to all who had been made acquainted with it was regarded as nothing short of a mad waste of money.

There was a handsome vessel lying at St. John's, which exactly fitted Alan's requirements. He chartered it for the trip with its captain and crew. To these he added several local carpenters and a builder. By way of cargo they took in an ample store of provisions, with a few articles of furniture, a store of bedding and cushions, and other necessaries for an encampment. The passengers were Alan Keith, Mr. and Mrs. David Keith, and Sally Mumford. The London lawyer could not spare the time for holiday-making. He had many details of business to complete in connection with the Keith fortunes, and, moreover, he felt that it was best for him to remain at the beck and call of the local bankers and solicitors, who found themselves

unusually busy with investments, transfers of stocks, shipments of bullion, and so on, not to mention the clearing up of the bequests of the late David Plympton.

When the St. John's captain found himself off the point where Alan desired him to shape his course for Wilderness Creek, the experienced old sailor flatly refused to give the necessary orders. He was not going to risk his ship, let alone the lives she carried, on the word of any man. He had his sailing chart. He knew the coast. Alan Keith had his chart also, and he knew the coast far better, he claimed, than the St. John's captain. Alan's chart was an example of a most complete survey, with every rock and channel clearly marked, not to mention soundings and points of observation that went into almost unnecessary details. The captain examined the nautical map with interest and curiosity. He admitted that there were harbours none the

less safe because they were comparatively unknown and others that as yet had no place in recognised charts; he did not deny that there had been instances of ships being literally blown into sheltering waters where they only expected destruction, and from the very rocks that eventually proved their chief protection; indeed he challenged none of Alan's statements except that of a clean safe channel lying inside the jagged rocks at the very point upon which Alan desired him to steer. After a time, the captain found himself leaning his back upon an argument that Alan soon found means of practically combating. The St. John's man said his crew would mutiny if he headed the ship for what must to them seem certain destruction even in the finest weather; one touch of such teeth at those that showed black and sharp in the blue, would be enough to cut a hole in the stoutest ship, or hold her tight and fast until she broke up.

Finally, however, this last objection was overcome by the lowering of a boat, David and Alan taking the oars, and having with them the mate and one of the oldest hands among the crew. The sea was like a millpond, except where it climbed about the rocks that seemed to snap and bite at the waves in the mouth of the channel. Alan proposed to steer. Three hours were occupied with this experimental trip. The mate's report, backed by the enthusiastic endorsement of the old sailor, was so emphatic in Alan's favour that the ship was headed for the creek, and with a summer breeze from the sea not more than enough to carry her behind the rocks and into deep water, the St. John's captain ran his vessel into the lovely harbour, amidst exclamations of surprise and such expression of wonder as one might have imagined bursting from the pioneer crews of Columbus and Cabot in presence of their earliest discoveries.

Before sundown the cargo was unloaded, and portions of it dragged through the cave, and hauled up on the table land above the Rock. Early the next morning the carpenters began to transform the ruined huts and sheds of the dead and gone crew of the "St. Dennis" into habitable shelters. Within thirty-six hours the little settlement was complete. The sailors and workmen remained on board ship. Alan and the rest, with a couple of servants, took up their quarters in and around the Berry Garden. Mr. and Mrs. David Keith were quite luxuriously accommodated. Sally Mumford was installed as head housekeeper, and she and her maids had a little wooden house all to themselves. Alan had his hammock slung in a cabin at the Western corner of the Garden, overlooking the valley, and also having a broad view of the sea, and bits of the rocky coast. The perfume of land-flowers all the time mingled with the smell of ocean weed

that came up with whiffs of pungent ozone. The plants which would bear their various fruits in the autumn were in full bloom in the Berry Garden. Swallows that had built their nests on the face of Demon's Rock filled the sunny air with their brisk cries. In the early mornings singing birds, with fewer notes but gayer feathers than the songsters of England, made their humble music in the grove of larch and spruce and birch that dipped down into the valley beyond. Butterflies winged their lazy flight from flower to flower and from bush to bush. The drowsy hum of bees mingled with the tiny plaints and curious signallings of still smaller things. Nature was just as busy in every direction as if all the civilised world had been looking on. It is wonderful to think what myriad communities of beings perfect of their kind, endowed with beauties beyond all the arts of man, are living within the laws of nature and

by the Divine fiat in every part of the globe utterly irrespective of human knowledge and beyond all human ken. In this vast animal kingdom philosophers tell us the fittest survive the universal conflict for existence. It must be a study of vast import and interest to consider the survival of the fittest in families and nations. The survivals of the wrack and blight of a hard world who come within the reader's contemplation at the conclusion of these faithful records, whether they be the fittest or otherwise, are notable examples of mixed fortunes; and while it is always more or less sad to say good-bye, in this case, one has the satisfaction of taking leave when the glass of good fortune is at "set-fair" in the lives of certain men and women whom we love. I hope I may say "we" in this connection, for then I shall not be alone in my reluctance to turn away from the Berry Garden of Labrador on this closing picture of a happy holiday.

They are sitting in the doorway of Alan Keith's log-cabin, the four persons who bring this history to an end.

It is evening. The sun has gone down. The sea is beginning to reflect a few stars and the image of the young moon. Alan Keith is smoking his long pipe. Sally Mumford is coaxing from her knitting needles the consolation of a more feminine habit. Alan does not taste the tobacco. Sally only hears the chatter of her needles. They are both thinking of the past, while finding their happiness in the present; for David is their happiness, David and the sweet wife who is worthy to be named while they are thinking of his mother. Mildred and David have risen from their low seats to watch the last beams of the sun give way to the silvery light of the crescent moon, which now looks like a brooch on the bosom of the sea. They are all touched by the beauty of the scene, and there is just the

merest suggestion of a pang in the note of the plover that comes up from the valley. They have already heard its warning cry. They know the summer is over. Thoughts unbidden and reflections that come of themselves belong to moments such as these. David finds himself hoping that when the last change of all comes to his father and the faithful woman who sits with her knitting on her knee and her thoughts far away, it will be like the summer that gradually fades into autumn and goes out with a gentle sigh that you do not know for one or the other, summer or autumn.

Presently there rises up in the Berry Garden a figure that looks like an antique warrior, the victorious counterpart of that torn and bleeding waif of the sea that gathered himself up from the jagged rocks of the cruel Bahamas and faced the lances of the burning sun.

"Many a time I've stood and looked across the

waters and seen visions," said Alan, "some hae come true, and some hae mocked me i' the storm. I wonder what ye may see, David, my son, as ye look out now wi' your wife by your side and God's immortal stars above ye, and that wonderfu' wee bit moon down yonder sae clear and bright that the sea might be the heavens and the heavens the sea?"

Alan put his arm about David's shoulders as he spoke, and David drew Mildred still closer by his side.

"May I answer for David?" the young and happy wife asked, leaning her head against David's strong arm.

"Aye, my lassie, tell us what ye see wi' your spiritual eyes?"

"I see a great hospital with nurses flitting from bed to bed; I see gentle almoners visiting the fatherless and the widow; I see orphan waifs of the street gathered into clean

and homely shelters, and fed and taught to read and pray; I hear the voices of a happy choir singing in a new church at Heart's Content; I see ships of God going out into the dark waters to take comforts for soul and body to the Fishermen of the North Sea and their brethren of Newfoundland; I see unsuspected misery discovered by sympathetic search and restored to health and work; I see a sad world made brighter; and I hear thousands blessing the name of Alan Keith."

"My child," said the old man, "if this may be sae, it shall stand, as an everlasting assurance of the unbounded mercy o' God, to a wicked but penitent sinner."

THE END.

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